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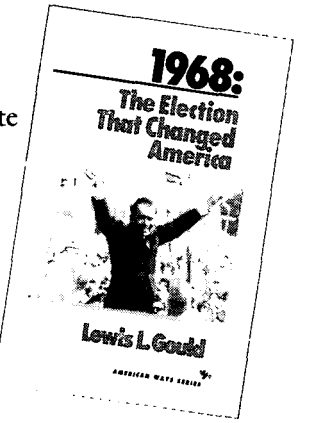

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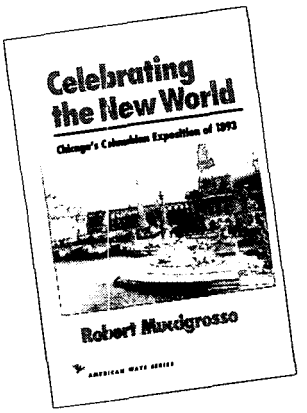

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Irving Howe

THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

We live in a time of diminished expectations. It's not exactly a time of conservative dominance, although the dominant politics in some countries is an unenthusiastic conservatism. Nor is it a time of liberal dominance, although in the United States the Clinton administration has given rise to some liberal hopes, by no means certain of realization. And it's certainly not a time of leftist domination, even though moderate social democratic parties hold office in some European countries.

It's tempting to compare this post–cold war moment to the postrevolutionary decades of early nineteenth-century England. But the comparison is of slight value, since what we are experiencing might better be called a postcounterrevolutionary moment. Idealistic visions, utopian hopes, desires for social renovation are all out of fashion—indeed, are regarded as dangerous illusions that set off memories of totalitarian disasters. Leftist bashing, in both newspaper editorials and learned books, is very much in. The current catchword is sobriety, which sometimes looks like a cover for depression.

This is true of the intellectual world, with the exception of a few mavericks like Günter Grass. It is also true for what remains of the European left—either solid, decent social democrats with barely a touch of fire left in them or unrepentant communists masquerading as socialists in Eastern Europe.

There are, of course, many reasons for this mood indigo, only a few years after the enthusiasm raised by the "velvet revolution" in Czechoslovakia and the Gorbachev reforms in the former Soviet Union. But in this comment I want to focus on only one reason: the aftermath, or perhaps more accurately, the aftertaste of the collapse of communism.

Some years ago Theodore Draper made a remark in conversation that has stuck in my mind: the central experience of the twentieth century, he said, was communism, like it or hate it. To be sure, there was fascism and the end of colonialism, but fascism could be seen as essentially a ghastly reaction to the rise of radicalism and the end of colonialism as an all-but-inevitable cluster of events. In its years of influence and power, communism seized upon the imagination of millions of people throughout the world. Communist parties were powerful in most of the major European countries; a bit later, they appropriated the heritage of anticolonialism in Asian and African countries; and even in the United States, where the Communist party was never a major force, it has been reliably estimated that nearly a million people passed through the Stalinist milieu (not the party) between, say, 1920 and 1950.

Declaring itself the legatee of humanism and the bearer of good news, communism inspired thousands—no, hundreds of thousands—of workers, students, intellectuals, to feats of devotion and, sometimes, heroism. Seldom have so many good people sacrificed themselves for so bad a cause. There were of course careerists, hacks and thugs in the communist movement; but for many ordinary people "the movement" burned with flames of hope. Those of us who were long-time anti-Stalinists, enclosed in our little groups and sects, found it hard to acknowledge the idealism—twisted, distorted, corrupted yet idealism nonetheless—that went into the communist movement. To be sure, in the East European countries the communist dictatorships attracted a large share of careerists (the kinds of people who in the United States might have been Republican officeholders). But there, too, the communists gained the support of decent, misguided followers. When the anti-Stalinist groups won over a handful of people from the Communist parties, it was almost always people who were intellectually and psychologically exhausted, their fanaticism burned out and their intellectual energies diminished.

The communist movement destroyed entire generations. The sheer waste of human resources, of the energies that might have been available for social renovation, is incalculable. With many rank-and-file militants, the sequel has been silence. With a good many former communist leaders, the sequel has been an ugly form of nationalism—as in Yugoslavia,

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where the leaders of both Serbia and Croatia are former prominent communists.

The results of this great historical disaster are staggering. Even those of us in the United States, insulated by our native mythologies, who were never tempted by Communism, are experiencing the consequences. New generations, new energies do not arrive overnight. There has first to be an interval of weariness, disillusionment, "pragmatism"—and diminished expectations.

You can see the signs of this exhaustion if you pick up any of the leading intellectual journals. Some are sour (usually edited by ex-radicals) and others are timid (usually edited by quasiliberals). Some subsist by mocking the hopes of their youth. Others avoid any long-range expectations or desires. Still others narrow their focus of concern to the daily routines of politics, sometimes saying useful things, though not much more.

What I've been saying here holds, I'm afraid, for large segments of the European social democracy. Let me be clear: if I lived in any of the major European countries, I would belong to or support the social democratic party. I might be critical, I might tilt a little toward whatever left wing it had. But I would be part of it.

Yet the truth is that, except in one or two countries, social democracy today has become a decent and honorable party that (rhetoric apart—and that even less and less) does not really aspire to move beyond the status quo. Little of the spirit of socialism remains in these parties. That much said, it's only fair to add that this isn't entirely their fault. For one thing, the constituencies of these parties, the people who vote for them, also share in their spiritual hesitation, their intellectual skepticism and bewilderment. It's not as if "the masses" are pressing the social democrats for a more radical outlook. Nor is it as if there were a clear socialist idea or vision that the parties reject. For the truth—as every *Dissent* reader learns from every issue we publish, perhaps to excess—is that the socialist idea is as precarious as the ideas of the conservatives and liberals, though the latter have the advantage of being at ease with the existing social and political order, while the social democrats presumably desire some change. The difficulty of formulating an attractive program is far more serious for the social democrats than for their opponents. Devoted to decency and democracy—no small matters—the social democrats cannot evoke the idealism and selflessness of the socialist yesterday. The memories of yesterday grow dimmer; one of the last to embody these was Willy Brandt, and now he is gone.

So there really is no point in the old-style leftist denunciation of social democracy. What we can and should criticize the social democrats for is not that they have failed to come up with the "answers"; it is for having largely abandoned the questions.

Well, we *Dissent*ers, the handful of us, try to hold fast to the vision of social transformation, even as we have dropped many of the traditional proposals for how to reach it. Some of us call this belief socialism, out of a wish for historical continuity or for lack of a better label. It's not that we're smarter than most European social democrats; not at all. Our advantage, if that's what it is, consists in the fact that we are distant from power and therefore able or, indeed, driven to think in terms of long-range possibilities, the revival of the democratic left in what may turn out to be the not-very-near future. Of course we also respond to immediate issues, so that *Dissent* carries articles about taxes, health care, budget crises, and so on. But even if, at a given moment, the immediate issues loom large, at least some of us want to think in terms of long-range options. We want, that is, to avoid the provincialism of the immediate.

That's why in almost every issue of *Dissent* you'll find one or two articles about "market socialism" or allied topics. Some of our readers, I suspect, quietly skip past these articles. That's OK, as long as they see why we print them. Often enough, these articles are provisional, a little abstract, and inclined to disagreements with one another. They don't necessarily paint a picture of an actual future—who can? But they are efforts to indicate possibilities of renewal. They provide materials for developments some of us will never live to see. They are, if you please, sketches of utopia.

That word "utopia" has come into disrepute. In much intellectual discussion it tends to be used as a term of dismissal. And, of course, there are versions of utopia—based on force or terror or the will of a self-appointed "vanguard"—that are abhorrent. We have had enough of these.

But there are other utopias. There is the democratic utopianism that runs like a bright thread through American intellectual life—call it Emersonianism, call it republicanism, call it whatever you like. There is the utopia of community and egalitarianism.

In an essay Lewis Coser and I wrote some forty years ago in the second issue of *Dissent*, we quoted a passage from Ernst Cassirer that still speaks to our condition:

A Utopia is not a portrait of the real world, of the

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actual political or social order. It exists at no moment of time and at no point in space; it is a "nowhere." But just such a conception of a nowhere has stood the test and proved its strength in the development of the modern world. It follows from the nature and character of ethical thought that it can never condescend to the "given." The ethical world is never given; it is forever in the making.

In the sense that Cassirer speaks of it, utopianism is a necessity of the moral imagination. It doesn't necessarily entail a particular politics; it doesn't ensure wisdom about current affairs. What it does provide is a guiding perspective, a belief or hope for the future, an understanding that nothing is more mistaken than the common notion that what exists today will continue to exist tomorrow. This kind of utopianism is really another way of appreciating the variety and surprise that history makes possible—possible, nothing more. It is a testimony to the resourcefulness that humanity now and then displays (together with other, far less attractive characteristics). It is a claim for the value of desire, the practicality of yearning—as against the deadliness of acquiescing in the "given" simply because it is here.

With all due modesty, I think this version of utopianism speaks for us. So, to friend and foe, at a moment when the embers of utopianism seem very low, I'd say: You want to call us utopians? That's fine with me. □

Guy Molyneux

PUTTING THE MIDDLE CLASS FIRST

Minutes before President Clinton delivered his major economic address to Congress, the television camera panned to Hillary Rodham Clinton in the gallery. Flanking her were Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, and John Sculley, CEO of Apple Computer. The political symbolism could not have been clearer.

Soon after making the speech, Clinton traveled to Hyde Park, New York, home of Franklin Roosevelt. In a private moment, he laid a single rose on the grave of the great Democrat. The political symbolism again was clear—if quite different.

Just what is one to make of Bill Clinton? Is he really the "New Democrat" that some on the left fear or the New Dealer that conservatives fear?

In fact, Clinton is "really" neither of these—or perhaps both. What is becoming clear is that Clinton's presidency marks a new political period. Old debates have effectively been settled, and new ones opened up. "Right" and "left" will take on new meanings.

As Clintonism takes shape, it needs to be understood in the context of the political project facing him and the Democratic party. Their mission: build a new majoritarian left-center coalition in an overwhelmingly middle-class nation. This has never been done, in the United States or anywhere else. Clinton himself is very conscious of this challenge. As governor, as presidential candidate, and as president, Clinton has placed the middle class at the center of his political message.

The left has of course long been skeptical, even suspicious, of direct appeals to the middle class. This was thought to be ineffective at best, an excuse for abandoning historic commitments at worst. The preferred political strategy, articulated by Jesse Jackson and others, was mobilizing the party's poor/minority/working class "base." Increasing voter turnout, through stronger commitment to the party's traditional values, would end the presidential losing streak. This could be complemented by appeals to some middle-class voters' generosity (or guilt) and liberal social attitudes. However, significant defections from the GOP were deemed implausible, and attempts to gain them promised only to undercut the Democratic base.

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For years, this remained an interesting theoretical argument. In 1992, however, Bill Clinton made it an empirical question. The left, it turned out, was sustantially wrong.

Clinton made direct appeals to the middle class, proclaiming that Republican economic policies had "squeezed" them economically, and promising to deliver broad-based economic growth. It worked. Clinton made his greatest gains, relative to Dukakis, among the middle and upper-middle classes. In 1988, Bush had won voters with incomes between $30,000 and $50,000 by about 14 percentage points. Clinton actually beat Bush among this group. Clinton won precisely because he went beyond the old base.

Turnout went up in 1992, but had no effect on the outcome. The Democrats won by increasing their share of the vote among key groups, such as suburbanites and Reagan Democrats, not by increasing turnout among traditional constituencies. First-time voters over age thirty (people entering the political system for some reason other than simply becoming old enough to vote) gave Clinton exactly the same percentage as everyone else. Perot did very well with this group. In fact, turnout analyst Curtis Gans has found a high correlation between increased turnout in an area and the vote for Ross Perot. It appears that many of the marginal voters were Perotistas.

Perot, even more than Clinton, wreaked havoc with the left's political analysis. When he emerged as a force in the spring, some called for a return to the "base" strategy, because the Democrats now arguably only needed 40 percent in a three-way matchup. But wasn't this an acknowledgment that the base strategy couldn't really get the party to a majority? Then Perot dropped out, undercutting the argument. Finally it became a three-way race again. Clinton stayed with his middle-class message, and prevailed. A more traditional "base" (read: liberal) message from Clinton would almost certainly have further boosted Perot, driving down Clinton's margin and perhaps even giving Bush a narrow plurality.

More fundamentally, Perot revealed that there were indeed voters who felt shutout by the current parties—but they were in the political center, not to the Democrats' left. Some on the left had seen little substantial difference between the two parties, but nineteen million Americans saw plenty of daylight there—and ran for it. Perot voters were solidly middle class, but economically pressured and anxious about the nation's future. Most were political moderates; only one in five called themselves a liberal. Incredibly, some third-party proponents pointed to Perot as proof there was space for independent politics after all—as though *where* that space was located were a mere detail!

Was Clinton's victory a vindication for the Democratic party's right wing? Not at all. Its argument had always been that the party needed to move right on foreign policy and social values. They explicitly rejected the notion that progressive economic appeals could win middle-class voters; they were mistaken. It was precisely economics that held together the winning biracial coalition so many analysts had deemed impossible.

Widespread economic insecurity united middle-class and poor voters behind the same candidate in 1992. When Clinton spoke of the forgotten middle class, it was their economic interests that had been forgotten. He spoke so often of stagnant wages and growing inequality that they have become virtual clichés. It's easy to forget that only a year ago such arguments were largely the province of journals like this one.

Tough financial times do not automatically move middle-class voters to the left. Indeed, the economic trends Clinton identified began in the mid-1970s. Conservatives portrayed the financial pressures then as the result of an over-generous welfare state giving too much money to the urban poor. Much of the middle class agreed. That the worst economic times had coincided with a Democratic presidency made Republicans' task easier. Reagan came in, and his debt-driven economic growth sold the middle class on the superiority of GOP economic management.

Had Republicans been able to deliver ongoing middle-class prosperity, their top-middle political coalition could have held together indefinitely. But they didn't. By the end of the 1980s, the steps taken by middle-class families to compensate for stagnant wages—principally sending women to work—had been exhausted. Then the white-collar recession of 1991 hit, and faith in Republican prosperity came unraveled. After twelve years of GOP rule, it was no longer plausible to blame Democrats for the financial squeeze felt by the middle class. The Democrats had their opportunity.

The social issues that have so preoccupied both wings of the Democratic party have now largely been settled (abortion) or made moot (anticommunism). These were old debates, rooted in the cold war or in the social and racial tensions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Clinton himself represents a fairly durable consensus: a liberal core, with a topping of "responsibility" rhetoric and a few tactical nods to conservatives (principally on the death penalty).

This is not to say the Democratic party will be free

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of internal divisions. But the divisions will be over economic rather than cultural issues. Democratic primaries will increasingly feature races like this year's Clinton-Tsongas contest—fights between those preaching fiscal responsibility and those with a more populist approach. From now on, "hawks" and "doves" will refer to one's position on the budget deficit, not the use of U.S. military force.

This marks a reversal from the pattern of the past quarter century. Republicans used to fight (when they fought) over economic doctrines—supply side vs. fiscal conservatism—and Democrats fought over values. Now the GOP has a values war raging inside it. This is an advantage for the Democrats, because on economic issues you can compromise—a little deficit reduction for you, some spending for you. On abortion or Nicaragua it's harder to split the difference.

That said, satisfying the two economic wings of the party will require great skill on Clinton's part. Clinton can't afford to completely ignore the call for "fiscal responsibility." The Perot voters, who are crucial to his re-election prospects, feel strongly about the issue (as do Tsongas voters). But there are dangers here for Clinton. One is that too much deficit reduction will choke off economic growth. That spells death for Clinton, because the one thing he was elected to do was restore prosperity.

The other danger is that he'll be steered away from the kind of broad entitlements that solidify support for government. The deficit cutters place great emphasis on limiting programs to the truly needy. But that is what got the Democrats in trouble with the middle class in the first place: it seemed government was taking care of everyone but them. Middle-class Americans say they don't like government spending. But what they really mean is that they don't like it when it isn't spent on them.

It will be a constant struggle for Clinton to balance these tensions. He seems to be a populist by training, but not by instinct. If Clinton sometimes sounded like a populist on the campaign trail, that was mostly because his opponents were first Tsongas and then Bush.

In the end, Clinton's was not much of a populist victory. Among voters who are culturally conservative and economically liberal—the essence of populism—Clinton won only a meager four-point victory over Bush. Among white voters with a high-school diploma Clinton won over Bush by a 40 to 38 percent margin. Same for whites with incomes between $15,000 and $30,000. That's not very impressive, in an election driven by economic discontent. A durable Democratic majority would need more solid support from such voters. The upper strata of the middle class can't be counted on regularly. Even as early as 1996, if the Republicans jettison their anti-abortion position and Clinton has pushed through tax increases, upper-middle-class voters may defect.

Jimmy Carter, the first post–New Deal Democratic president, didn't navigate these waters very well. The good news for Democrats is that Clinton himself, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, noted that Carter "adopted certain austerity policies . . . [that] wound up disappointing a lot of his blue-collar base on economic issues." Clinton presumably does not intend to repeat those mistakes.

Clinton's early weeks looked dangerously Carteresque: gays in the military to alienate straight working-class men and much talk of "sacrifice" for deficit reduction. Yet the economic plan Clinton actually unveiled suggested he understood why he, and not Tsongas or Perot, was standing before the House and Senate. The deficit would come down somewhat, to be sure, but almost entirely from new taxes on the wealthy and defense cuts. His commitment to public investment remained intact.

Clinton aspires to do more than simply increase economic growth and gain reelection. He wants to re-legitimize government in the eyes of the middle class. Middle-class Americans think of themselves not as beneficiaries of government so much as its financial supporters. Perhaps nothing was more important to the dismantling of the New Deal coalition than millions of people starting to think of themselves as "taxpayers." Those who think that the old coalition can be rebuilt should remember that virtually none of the Americans who voted for Franklin Roosevelt paid any income tax at all. We live now in a very different world.

Middle-class voters also remain deeply skeptical of government's ability to solve the problems they face. Faith in government declined as the country endured Vietnam, Watergate, and the collapse of the Great Society, and has never been restored. The response of the middle class is to privatize everything it can. Many have done this with child care, for example, which is why the demand for government-provided or -assisted care is less than might be expected. For Democrats, the trick is to find problems middle-class people can't solve on their own.

Clinton has two answers, and they're good ones. The first is prosperity. No one believes they can create good jobs on their own. "The real challenge,"

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according to Clinton adviser Sam Popkin, is to "convince people that government can be a creator of nongovernment jobs." That's what the "investment" concept is about. The idea is to persuade people that there is an ongoing role for activist government in fueling private-sector growth.

The second is health care. Until fairly recently, most middle-class Americans could count on receiving good health insurance from their employers. But the affordability crisis, together with the end of lifetime employment with a single firm, has convinced Americans that only a collective solution is possible. Successfully reforming the American health care system is obviously an enormously challenging task, with plenty of ways to fail. But if Clinton can provide decent universal care, without severe rationing or limits on doctor choice, the political payoffs for the Democratic party could be extraordinary.

The rose on FDR's grave notwithstanding, Clinton is indeed a "new Democrat." He does not use the Democrats' traditional language, much of which has its origins in the civil rights struggle. That was the language of "justice" and "oppression." It spoke to people who were excluded, and demanded—rightly—inclusion.

Clinton speaks the language of the middle class, which feels more neglected than oppressed. Middle-class Americans don't demand "inclusion"; they want others—both the rich and the poor—to play by the same rules they live by. They also believe in private property—they don't have a lot, but they have far more than chains to lose. That's why Clinton talks so frequently about hard work, and why he labels public spending "investment."

But unlike many "new Democrats" before him, he hopes to sell an expanded—not shriveled—vision of government to the American people. He acknowledges the middle class's cynicism regarding government, but so as to challenge it rather than pander to it. He says he's tired of the defeatists who say government can't be made to work again for ordinary people. Conservative strategist William Kristol said perceptively that the goal of Clinton's economic address was "to reverse the Reagan agenda and to convince the middle class that their interest lies with big government."

It won't be an easy sell. But if the middle class isn't buying, then there's just no market for government. And the Democrats appear to have, at least so far, a talented salesman making their pitch.□

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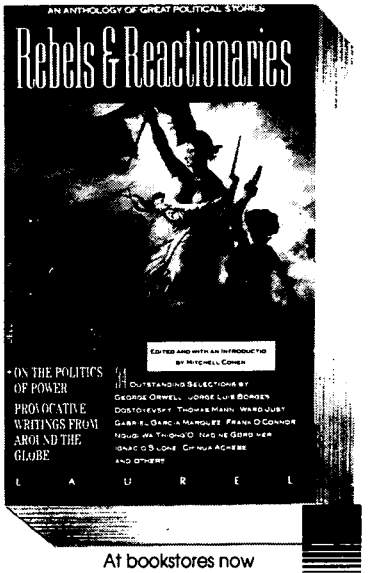
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Clinton Proposes, We Respond

Harold Meyerson

WHERE WILL CLINTON GO?

FEBRUARY 8, 1993

At bottom, the euphoria with which the public has welcomed Bill Clinton to Washington—and which, if the polls are right, has substantially survived his rocky first few weeks—is a euphoria at the reinvention of government. Euphoria just that a government exists again, that it isn't gridlocked, that it's identified the problems (if not yet all the solutions), that it doesn't abdicate on ideological grounds when confronted with the challenge of rebuilding America.

Which is not to say the liberal moment is upon us. Public skepticism at the idea of government remains high. But if Bill Clinton's 43 percent mandate in the November election was not quite a clarion call for social democracy, George Bush's 38 percent was a decisive repudiation of Republican rule, a verdict that twelve years of laissez-faire had imperiled American jobs and living standards.

The old order is discredited; it is not yet dispelled. Clinton's activist agenda—universal health insurance, worker training programs, "invest and grow" economics—has been beset from the start by the artifacts of a conservative era: chiefly by the discrediting of public enterprise and a deficit designed to continue Reaganism by other means. Clinton has repeatedly been urged not to test these limits, to resign himself to the economic and political restraints he has inherited. Better to sacrifice some of his program, the argument goes, than to risk the wrath of the markets or the ire of Ross Perot.

The constraints on Clinton *are* excruciating—and if he prudently adhered to them, he would guarantee that there would be no Clinton program or second term. Clinton was elected because he offered a program for economic revitalization that struck voters as plausible and fair. But realizing his moderate goals may require more immoderate means than he's been accustomed to pursuing. In particular, cobbling together an enduring Clinton majority out of his own base of support and November's Perotistas won't be accomplished by policies of fiscal constraint but by a more unabashed populism. And enacting his domestic program, or even just presiding over an economic recovery, may prove difficult without forcing changes on unwilling global markets.

Clinton, after all, is the first reform president to try to exert the power of the state over an economy that's no longer only national. Merely reformist ends, in this new world disorder, may require radical means.

Which will have to be achieved without notably radical appointments. The two tendencies that dominate the administration are the Wall Street/K Street corporate establishment, a bastion of fiscal orthodoxy on macroeconomic questions, and the liberal wonks, who will provide some innovative policies in matters non- and microeconomic.

What was missing from the mix during the transition and the administration's first weeks was the populists, which in Clinton's entourage

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means the pols. During the campaign, they not only sharpened Clinton's message but played a decisive role in tilting the economics leftward. In the spring of 1992, when the policy liberals made the case within the campaign for a public investment program, it was the pols—consultants James Carville and Paul Begala, pollster Stanley Greenberg—whose arguments for the program's political merits put it over the top.

The Carville-led war room that guided the campaign was disbanded on election day; that now looms as the transition's biggest mistake. Carville was the Cajun Falstaff left behind as Clinton transformed himself from boyish candidate to serious statesman—a Falstaff, however, who offered a surer guide to governance than the Beltway insiders. Then-transition director Warren Christopher, for instance, was hardly the person to gauge the sense of outrage and betrayal that the revelation of Zoe Baird's employment of illegal aliens would unleash. Christopher knows K Street; Carville knows K-Mart—and Carville's expertise is much the more valuable as the new president struggles with his economic plan. The salutary effect of the Baird affair is that it forced Clinton to this conclusion, too. The pols have now returned, primarily to remind Clinton why *his* program—not Paul Tsongas's, not Ross Perot's—prevailed.

The Perot Vote

Clinton entered office to a steady drumbeat of demands from $90,000-a-year editorialists for tax hikes on $30,000-a-year retirees. But deficit reduction über alles has been a preoccupation of the American elite for years. What's new is the prominence that deficit reduction has assumed in mass public opinion—a change that is partly Ross Perot's doing.

But does Clinton win the Perot vote by embracing the Perot program? More likely, applied Perotism is a prescription for economic and political disaster. First, reducing the deficit along the lines Perot laid out will abort what is already the frailest of recoveries. Second, it's not even clear that deficit reduction is the sine qua non of Perotism. To be sure, the pollsters tell us that Perot's supporters are more skeptical about government intervention than Clinton's. But, paradoxically, Perot also stood for the prospect of decisive governmental action, freed from the constraints of politics. (One of his favorite lines was "Let's do it!"—leaving studiously undefined what exactly "it" was.) Perot was not merely the deficit hawk. He was also the trade hawk, the industrial policy hawk.

And neither can his supporters be categorized neatly as deficit reduction fiends—as, say, Paul Tsongas's might. Indeed, the Perot vote had no traditional political definition. While Clinton ran best among liberals and worst among conservatives, and Bush's vote had precisely the opposite character, Perot's had no ideological identity whatever. He won 17 percent of the liberal vote, 21 percent of the centrist and 18 percent of the conservative. Similarly, Clinton ran best among the poorest voters and worst among the wealthiest, while the class contours of Bush's vote were predictably the reverse. But the Perot vote, again, neither rose nor fell across the lines of income.

There was one other presidential candidate whose voters fit the profile of Perot supporters in the '92 campaign, and that was Jerry Brown. What Brown and Perot had in common, of course, wasn't the politics of deficit reduction, but their war on politics and on the culture of money that dominates it. Both exuded an impatience with politics-as-usual that won them followings that were disproportionately young. It's that impatience, and a literal distance from any political institutions (unions, say, or urban organizations) that defines Perot's voters, even more than their anti-deficit zeal. November exit polls showed Perot supporters to be not only younger than average, but also more likely to be non-college educated, white, male, suburban, Western. This is also a profile of voters who see government as an agency that taxes them to benefit others, precisely the kind of voters to whom the universality of Clinton's proposals was intended to appeal.

Hostile though they be toward both government and politics, the Perotistas are nonetheless an action faction, too. Deficit reduction matters to them, but so does a managed trade

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policy and, I would guess, a credible, universal, latter-day WPA. An even surer article of support—and one, unlike deficit reduction, that would unite Perot supporters with Clinton's—would be campaign finance reform. From my vantage point on the far side of the Capitol Reflecting Pool, Clinton's biggest applause line in his inaugural address was his attack on the money-driven culture of Capitol politics. Friends who heard the address on the near side of the Reflecting Pool tell me that closer to the seats of power the applause was nowhere so vociferous. Clinton doesn't need Carville to remind him that there are more votes on the far side of the Pool than on the near.

Besides, Clinton carried a number of historically Republican constituencies last November not because he promised caution ahead but quite the reverse—a burst of activism, even state planning.

The key state to building an enduring Democratic majority, surely, is California, which before November had gone Democratic in just one presidential election since 1948. Linchpin of the Republican presidential coalition from 1968 through 1992, birthplace of the tax revolt of the late 1970s, home to both Nixon and Reagan, California was the place where the New Deal order succumbed to a new regime of low taxes and laissez-faire government.

Except that beneath the broad support for right-wing non-intervention lurked an even broader support for right-wing intervention—for that distinctly conservative brand of Keynesianism known as defense spending. And when defense spending fell prey to the end of the cold war, it turned out that *any* intervention—right-wing, left-wing, planning for conversion, industrial policy—was preferable to none.

The key to the realignment of California, and a key to Clinton's victory nationally, was the rise in middle-class insecurity, apparent in such indices as the percentage of the unemployed who had held white-collar jobs. In previous postwar recessions, white-collar workers made up about 20 percent of the unemployed. In the recession of '90–92, they made up about 40 percent. In California, that 40 was drawn disproportionately from aerospace scientists and engineers, and it spelled an end to the huge vote totals the Republicans characteristically racked up in such conservative bastions as Orange County.

The swing voters of California weren't drawn to Clinton by his fiscal prudence. It was his stump speech decrying the fact that the U.S. was "the only nation that would shut down its defense industry and not have a plan for the people thrown out of work." It was his analysis that manufacturing mattered, his pledge to place the government's R&D capacities at the call of civilian manufacturing, his interest in managed trade, at least when it came to crucial new products like computer chips. Clinton's success among two key swing constituencies—Sunbelt suburbanites and high-tech industries (many of whose leading executives, from Hewlett-Packard CEO John Young on down, endorsed him)—derived precisely from his rejection of laissez-faire and his support for public investment along the lines that high tech approved.

By campaign's end, high-tech had positioned itself to become for Clinton what the mass-merchandising sector had been for Roosevelt: the sector of capital committed to Democratic economics. As Stephen Fraser makes clear in his biography of Sidney Hillman, an important source of support and funding for Roosevelt was marketers such as the Filenes, who had a keen interest in policies that boosted and stabilized consumer purchasing power. Today, from Silicon Valley to Route 128 to L.A.'s aerospace row, high-tech execs have a similarly keen interest in policies that ease their transition to a post-Soviet world. They've already been rewarded with one of Clinton's most innovative appointments—that of Laura Tyson, an economist utterly disenthralled with the shibboleths of laissez-faire, to chair the Council of Economic Advisers.

The Ghost of the CIO

Clinton needs to do well at the peripheries of the Democratic coalition, because the Democratic core continues to erode. In particular, deunionization is taking its toll. In the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections, for example,

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voters from households that had at least one union member—a group that tends to vote 12 to 13 percent more Democratic than the electorate at large—constituted 26 and 25 percent of the electorate, respectively. Last November, they made up only 19 percent of the voters.

Revitalizing America's unions would not only help Clinton's political prospects; it would further his economic policies. On the campaign trail, Clinton argued that we had fallen behind other nations—Germany in particular—that had trusted their workers with more knowledge about the work process and more power to affect it. "We need to be working smarter," Clinton said over and over again. Not coincidentally, all the nations Clinton cited as "working smarter" were nations that have higher rates of unionization than the United States. Though Governor Clinton's record of union support was spotty, candidate Clinton made the best implicit case for unionization heard on the stump in years.

That, at least, is the conclusion reached by the leaders of half a dozen major internationals, who are arguing that it is time to resurrect labor-law reform—rewriting the National Labor Relations Act to allow for the kind of innovative workplace Clinton champions and to enable workers to organize once more. The last time labor-law reform was floated, during the Carter administration, it was savaged as a piece of "special interest" legislation. Though Clinton has never discussed labor law reform per se, he nonetheless offers a way out of the "special interest" trap: organized workers are indispensable to creating Clinton's "high-skill, high-wage" twenty-first-century economy.

For a movement that once represented one-third of private-sector workers and now represents one-tenth, you'd think the opening Clinton provides would be a welcome one. But not at the AFL-CIO, which has been distinctly unenthusiastic about the congressional hearings that liberal Illinois Senator Paul Simon has convened on reforming labor law. "The issue requires an in-depth study" rather than a rush to hearings, says Robert McGlotten, the Federation's lobbyist. Instead, McGlotten insists, labor's agenda should be limited to those items left on the table from the Bush administration—the striker replacement ban, family leave (now enacted), the issues surrounding NAFTA, and the enactment of a form of national health insurance that forgoes "any taxation of our members' health care benefits."

Unexceptionable positions all—and ones that largely fail to address the larger concerns of the 85 percent of the work force that isn't unionized. "Some parts of labor are simply out to protect what small membership they have and are putting forth the most parochial agenda imaginable," says a ranking official of one international. "After twelve years, you'd think these folks would have thought through what they want out of a Democratic administration. But they haven't." Even more galling is the Federation's continuing preoccupation with foreign policy. Lane Kirkland, as one leader puts it, "has been more concerned with who will be heading the USIA than with who will be heading the Department of Labor."

The push for a more ambitious agenda has originated from a number of internationals that haven't always been boat-rockers (the list includes the Steelworkers, the Mine Workers, AFSCME and the Clothing Workers). Then again, the Mine Workers under John L. Lewis weren't historically a source of dissidence either—until the prospects for organizing took a quantum leap with the accession of Roosevelt, and AFL president William Green proved totally indifferent to the opportunity. One month into the Clinton administration, Kirkland is looking more and more like a dead ringer for Green. What's not clear, given the dispirited state of unions and their leadership, is whether anyone is remotely capable of becoming a latter-day Lewis.

The most critical 1930s parallel, of course, is that Clinton, like Roosevelt, is a probusiness president who, without wishing to, will have to duke it out with capitalism in order to renew the system. The most critical difference is that the capitalism Clinton confronts is global.

A number of Clinton's domestic priorities simply can't be achieved domestically. Increasing the number of good manufacturing jobs, for

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instance, depends on a managed trade policy that begins with raising wages and workplace and environmental standards in Mexico—and then might move to mandating a hemispheric or global minimum wage (establishing a percentage, say, of the value added to a product) through a broader treaty. Ending the recession at home may require ending it in Western Europe and Japan as well.

As John Eatwell pointed out in a recent issue of the *American Prospect*, the sovereignty of the markets over governments is not an immutable planetary fact but a historically specific development. From the end of World War II through 1971, currency speculation was a rather minor activity. During this time, under the Bretton Woods accord that pegged the values of the world's currencies to the dollar, there was nothing to speculate against: 90 percent of currency transactions were long-term investments. Since the collapse of the system in 1971, the values of the world's currencies have become subject to constant revaluation against one another: today, 90 percent of currency transactions are pure speculation. Simply reinventing social spending may require reining in the markets—fixing some international currency ratios pegged, say, to the mark, the yen, and the dollar.

Only one transfer of power in the West over the past several decades has provided a sense of one era dying and another being born comparable to Clinton's arrival in Washington: the accession of François Mitterrand and the French Socialists in 1981. Then as now, a newly activist government would provide the jobs, the industry, the sense of equity and new beginnings after two decades of conservative control. Paris, like Washington, rocked all night when the center-left took power.

Clinton's agenda, of course, is nowhere so radical as Mitterrand's. Nonetheless, many of the same forces that thwarted the French Socialists are arrayed against the reforms Clinton has said he'll pursue. Clinton may be tempted to try a grand compromise—Reich fosters a more egalitarian workplace, say, while Panetta comes in with a budget that reassures the markets. It's certainly the course of least resistance. But it will do little to rebuild the American economy, and even less to reinvent the Democratic coalition. □

POST–STATE-OF-THE-UNION POSTSCRIPT:

Well, he resisted the worst of the Panetta temptation. The program Clinton's now laid out is fundamentally liberal, in the tradition of Roosevelt and Johnson. It is, to begin, redistributive—taking its funding from the rich and the Pentagon, and giving tens of billions of dollars to the working poor, via the earned income tax credit and a higher minimum wage.

But Clinton's liberalism must be more cunning than that of his Democratic predecessors. Taking office, as they did not, at a time when the dominant ideology for the past two decades has been relentlessly antigovernment, Clinton has to recreate not merely government but the constituency for government. So far, he's doing just that.

First, he's increased the progressivity of taxes, which gives government a more politically sustainable funding base. A recent *Newsweek* poll found that by a margin of two to one, Americans thought it more important to raise taxes on the rich than cut taxes on the middle class. By creating fairer taxes, Clinton has created the space for a more activist state.

Second, by raising taxes both to fund that activism and reduce the deficit, Clinton has substantially defused elite opposition both to the tax increase and the Pentagon cuts. The deficit reduction incurs a price, of course: many of Clinton's programs—worker retraining, for instance—are nowhere near as well funded as they should be.

Third, most of Clinton's new programs should have broad-based support. Some, like the college loan–national service program, appeal through their universality. Some, like the earned income tax credit, appeal through their reciprocity: they reward work, they're not offering "something for nothing." Some, like increasing civilian R&D, can be justified as making America more competitive.

And yet, it's the spending side of Clintonomics, not the cutbacks, that's encountered the opposition. Part of the problem is that decades of governmental inaction has bred

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popular contempt for government. Since the mid-sixties, most new government programs have either been regulatory or targeted narrowly to specific minority or income groups. For millions of Americans, then, taxes are real but programs are less so, and the ensuing skepticism is the biggest obstacle Clinton must surmount. As I write, the effective opposition to Clinton in Congress isn't coming from Republicans but from conservative Democrats. Persuading these legislative titans not to whittle away the Democrats' last best hope at governing will take all Clinton's wiles. But as he makes his trade-offs on the Hill, he needs forces on the ground: supporters in every district who are at least an implicit threat to Perotnoid congressional Democrats.

The problem is that over the past half century, America's politics have atrophied alongside America's government. Clinton has come up with the first government program in decades intended to create a more equitable nation, but the institutional forces for greater equity—unions above all—have dwindled to near-insignificance over that time. With the Democratic National Committee as his improbable base, Clinton may have to try building a mass movement from the ground up. His ultimate challenge, it turns out, won't be reinventing government. It will be reinventing politics. □

Mark Levinson

REGARDING CLINTON'S ECONOMIC PACKAGE

Bill Clinton won the presidency by promising the "most dramatic economic growth program since World War II." In contrast to Bush, who offered no solutions to economic problems (he barely recognized any), Clinton emphasized the need to create millions of high-wage jobs, provide tax relief to working families, expand training and education, and ensure affordable health care for every citizen.

Clinton inherits a sluggish economy savaged by twelve years of Republican mismanagement. The economy is stuck with high business, consumer, and government debt; a glut of empty office buildings; falling defense spending that is especially hurting New England and Southern California; state and local budget problems; inadequate productive investment; stagnant wages and faltering economies in Europe and Japan that are holding down demand for U.S. exports.

Shortly after the election it was announced that the economy grew at an annual rate of 3 percent during the second half of 1992 and that the deficit was higher than previously thought—close to $300 billion a year through at least 1996. Few seemed to realize that the higher deficit was in large part responsible for the economic growth.

The higher-than-expected economic growth led some in the Clinton administration to question the need for any economic stimulus. They feared a stimulus would ignite the kind of inflation that destroyed the presidency of Jimmy Carter. The higher deficit projections seemed to call into question Clinton's proposals for job training, investments in public works and a middle-class tax cut. With the urgency of fiscal stimulus seemingly taken away by unexpected economic growth and the new deficit figures making deficit reduction the administration's top economic priority, Clinton appeared, for a time, to be left with an economic program that combined Perot's

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emphasis on deficit reduction with Bush's hope that the economy would take care of itself.

Perhaps Clinton, who is said to possess impressive tactical savvy, realized the absurdity of adopting the economic program of the candidates he defeated. In addition there were strong objective reasons, despite the uptick in economic growth and the new deficit figures, to carry out his campaign pledge to aggressively stimulate the economy.

There has been no job growth for two years now. The current lack of any rebound in jobs, despite the "recovery," is unprecedented. If jobs increased as they have in past business cycles, several million workers who currently lack jobs would again be employed. Furthermore, a deteriorating global economy, restrictive state and local government fiscal policies, pressure on consumers to reduce debt, falling wages, and higher-than-expected tax payments this spring might even throw the economy into recession. (Last year President Bush reduced withholding tax rates in order to spur consumer spending. Although this may have boosted the economy last year, it will result this spring in higher-than-expected tax payments.)

Clinton's program tries to please everyone. A modest economic stimulus is combined with a much larger effort to reduce the deficit. Clinton's four-year plan consists of tax increases and spending cuts totaling $500 billion and new spending of $170 billion. The best part of the plan is that it provides funds for such worthy projects as improving the infrastructure, Head Start, summer jobs for youth, and an apprenticeship program for non–college-educated youth, and especially that it is funded by progressive changes in the tax system. The president's plan calls for income taxes to rise only for those couples with adjusted gross income over $180,000, corporate taxes to be increased, and the new energy taxes to be modest and offset for low-income taxpayers by increases in the earned income tax credit and other benefits.

While this part of Clinton's plan is a very welcome reversal of Reaganomics, the one thing the plan is not is bold. There will be no stimulus this year because the increased spending (only about $8 billion) will not even make up for the larger tax payments due this spring. In comparison to the Kennedy-Johnson 1964 tax cut or even the Ford administration's 1975 acceptance of congressional demands for anti-recessionary action, the Clinton plan is disappointingly timid. Kennedy-Johnson economists, moreover, started with a less unhealthy economy than does Clinton. Unemployment in 1962, the year in which Kennedy first sought congressional action, averaged 5.6 percent. In those innocent days, this was an unacceptable figure and the administration aimed at 4 percent "interim" unemployment and an ultimate 3 percent figure. By depressing contrast, 1992 unemployment averaged 7.3 percent. According to the Economic Policy Institute, a stimulus *twice as large as Clinton's* would reduce unemployment only to the same 5.5 percent to 6 percent range that sufficed to alarm the Kennedy economists into recommending a stronger economic response.

During the campaign Clinton put economic growth and jobs *before* deficit reduction. Now he has reversed himself, and therein lies the problem. The deficit is not the cause of our fiscal problems, it is *the result*. A large reduction in government spending will reduce demand without increasing productive investment. Cutting spending too much could cause a slowdown if not a recession; it could also reduce revenue and increase public assistance costs. Paradoxically, cutting spending to reduce the deficit may increase the deficit.

The new deficit projections are no reason to make deficit reduction the top priority. The deficit last year was equal to 5.4 percent of the $6 trillion in new wealth created in 1992 in the United States. This should not be considered excessive for a country emerging from a recession characterized by lost tax revenue and higher public assistance and unemployment compensation costs. At the end of the last recession in 1983 the deficit hit 6.3 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), and it stayed at 5 percent or more until 1987.

Which is not to say the deficit is unimportant. But its importance is more political than economic. David Stockman once admitted that the purpose of the deficit was to make the Reagan revolution irreversible. People who

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want an activist government would have to acquiesce: "There isn't any money."

The fundamental problem facing the U.S. economy is not the deficit but rather slow growth caused by the decline in productive investment (due not to a shortage of funds but to the use of financial resources for speculation), falling wages and declining living standards for the majority of Americans, and slow growth in the world economy.

With people needing goods, services, and jobs, and with productive capacity lying idle, there is no excuse for austerity. Even if one were to accept that deficit reduction is important, the best way to achieve it is to put people to work. Each decline of one percent in unemployment reduces the deficit by some $50 billion. In order for Clinton to reduce the deficit in the long run it will be necessary to increase it in the short run by aggressively implementing his campaign pledge to expand public investment. This means a *substantial* increase in public spending on infrastructure, aid to state and local governments, child care, public education, housing, and renewable energy.

The cornerstone of Clinton's proposal to create a high-wage work force is to increase spending on training and education. It has become an article of faith that while the economy of the future will require more high skilled professional and technical workers, the work force will increasingly consist of workers with inadequate skills. In this caricature of the labor market, good jobs exist but they cannot be filled by workers who lack the necessary (symbolic, analytic) skills.

There is a problem in over-selling training. A recent example is a new book (*Thinking for a Living*) by Ray Marshall, secretary of labor in the Carter administration, and educator Marc Tucker. According to Marshall and Tucker, in today's economy the key policy factors are not adequate consumer demand or the growth of the money supply. "Instead, the crucial factors

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turn out to be an adequate supply of high-quality human resources, business strategies that emphasize quality and productivity, and a pattern of work organization that fosters both of these goals."

This is a dangerous half truth. Certainly, the United States underinvests in training and education. But it is simply not true that training and education will lead to the creation of good jobs. While not denigrating the need for education and training, Larry Mishel and Ruy Teixeira of the Economic Policy Institute have shown (using the government's own projections) that the growth of job-skill requirements is actually projected to slow down in the future and, in the absence of a different economic policy, the higher skill requirements will coincide with decreased compensation levels. The kind of available jobs depends on industrial, trade, and macro-economic policies; the power of unions; and training. Training and education by themselves will not make up for the dramatic fall in wages for most American workers.

Clinton will not be able to revive the U.S. economy without addressing the problems of the world economy. He needs to enlist the cooperation of the major nations in a common program of economic growth. Getting Japan and Germany to reduce their trade surpluses by increasing their imports would be a good start. It also means getting central bankers to agree to a very liberal monetary policy and changing the austerity policies of the World Bank and IMF. These institutions could do much more to alleviate the third-world debt burden and to inject investment into those areas of the world economy that now act as a drag on economic growth.

Clinton appears to be faced with a contradiction between his goals and the measures by which he seeks to achieve them. See for example an interview Clinton gave to the *Wall Street Journal* (December 18, 1992):

> I was trying to leave as much money in the corporate sector as I could for reinvestment in the economy. My whole view was that if we had investment tax credits, and we have other investment incentives and they were paid for by raising rates on individuals, that more individuals would invest, but the corporations would be naturally inclined to do that anyway . . .

If one accepts corporate domination of the economy it is "natural" to give "incentives" to the owners of capital and hope that something will trickle down. But what corporations "would be naturally inclined to do" is not necessarily what is best for the U.S. economy.

One more point: the fundamental causes of our economic difficulties include a revolution in technology that has led to the loss of thousands of skilled and semiskilled jobs; the fierce competition of Japan, Western Europe, and the newly industrialized countries, which pay low wages and discourage unions; a crude spree of speculation in the Reagan-Bush years, which contributed to an insufficiency of capital investment; and the difficult transition from war production required by the end of the cold war. These are mainly *systemic* problems, not merely part of the usual up-and-down cycles of capitalist economies. Whatever the merits of Clinton's economic package—and parts of it have a distinct merit—it is not likely to do much to cope with these deeper problems. For that, a program of sustained social planning and investment would be required.

Meanwhile, as I write a week or so after Clinton announced his package, it is already clear that resistance from the right, including some Democrats, is building up in Congress. Segments of big business—some openly, some obliquely—are supporting this resistance. What these people want is to amputate the progressive portions of Clinton's package. It is, I think, very much in the interests of labor, African Americans, feminists, and other progressive communities to campaign against this right-wing counterattack. □

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Rashi Fein

WHAT WE NEED IN HEALTH CARE

It is clear that President Clinton will submit a health care reform package to Congress. It even seems clear that something labeled health care reform will be enacted. What is not clear is what that something will look like.

The first battle will take place within the executive branch, among the various presidential advisers. That battle for the heart and mind of the President is our battle as well.

We who want fundamental change that deals with both access and costs and who want to contain costs by reforming the system, though not by placing the burden of restraint on patients, understand that we cannot be certain of ultimate victory even if the president chooses the appropriate path. We can be certain that if the president submits a measure that merely tinkers at the edges, the Congress will not enact a bolder plan.

The President needs effective health care reform legislation and he needs it quickly.

Clinton *needs* health care reform because his entire economic plan, his ability to reduce the deficit, to undertake new programs, and to strengthen America's international competitive position, rests on constraining the explosive expansion of health care costs.

It is the economic dimension of the problem that propels the debate and will lead to action. Yet, that way of defining the reform issue may serve to constrain the president's program. Already we begin to hear that first we must tame the inflationary pressures in health care and only then will we be able to expand coverage for the uninsured. This president, like President Carter before him, is being told that universality is a good thing, but not affordable till. . . . Already we hear that Medicare and Medicaid savings should go toward deficit reduction rather than coverage expansion. We are told that the first priority must be to cut the deficit, that the plan to do so must be perceived as "real," that the "bond market is watching," and that access will have to wait.

We must press for *comprehensive* reform. We know that if universal access is postponed till expenditures are stabilized, if access is held hostage to cost containment, we will not attain either goal. Comprehensive reform cannot be segmented. We know that without universal access the private sector will choose to reduce the expansion in expenditures by cutting benefits and services for those who are the most vulnerable.

The president should address the cost issue *immediately*. It should be dealt with on an emergency basis even in advance of the submission of comprehensive reform. Health care expenditures are close to $900 billion per year and rising rapidly. Since even the most optimistic among us recognize that major reforms would not be implemented and effective until two or more years from now, we will face a new expenditure base perhaps $200 billion higher than today's level. The president must act today, before expenditures exceed a trillion dollars. He can do so in a way that will not only restrain the growth of health care expenditures but will also speed the adoption of a reform package.

President Clinton should put in place an emergency wage-price freeze for the health sector. The last time we had such a freeze—and it worked—was in the early 1970s and applied to the entire economy. The president will be told that such a freeze can't succeed when applied to only one sector. Not so; the rest of the economy is characterized by stable prices. There will be no massive distortions caused by a frozen health sector caught up in a

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runaway economy. The president will also be told that such a freeze can't really work because, as in the early seventies, once it is removed prices will simply explode. Not so. Clinton should announce that the freeze will not be removed until we have enacted a long-run cost-containment program. That very pledge will help bring the various constituencies to the negotiating table. A freeze will distress those who produce health care supplies and services. It will be supported by the public and large employers. Their savings on premiums will be a significant economic stimulus.

This act would indicate the importance the president places on health care reform and it would do so through deed, not words. Nevertheless, it would be no more than temporary. What should we press for as part of a long-run measure?

Though the United States is not Canada, much of the structure we should seek would have characteristics similar to those found in Canada. Some of the important characteristics can also be found in our own Medicare program. Medicare is more complex than it once was, and its benefits are more limited than they should be, but it does enroll all the aged in a single program. This is an important characteristic of a truly universal program and one that prevents competition by insurers around risk selection—a competition designed to exclude individuals who might need more than an average amount of care. Furthermore, in large measure, both Canadian provincial systems and Medicare are financed through taxes rather than regressive premiums. The U.S. tax structure is hardly a model of progressivity, but it is fairer than premium-based financing. A comprehensive program can use Canada and Medicare as a template.

To achieve true universality and cost containment not based on denial of care we need and should press for the enactment of a tax-based, publicly administered, social insurance health care program. Such a program would break the existing link between health insurance and employment, a link that schemes for managed competition and play-or-pay would strengthen. That link has impinged negatively on the availability of insurance, on labor mobility, and on the employment possibilities for high-risk individuals. A tax-based, publicly administered program can collect and disburse funds through a single entity and constrain expenditures by adopting a defined budget ceiling. Unlike managed care, it relies on budgets, not on market competition, to constrain expenditure growth.

The health reform program should provide comprehensive benefits analogous to those provided to our neighbors to the north: that is, such physician and hospital services as are medically necessary. That broad and useful definition has not bankrupted the Canadian provinces. Per capita health care expenditures are substantially less in Canada than in the United States. Canadians do not face cost-sharing via deductibles and co-insurance. Through public administration and a single-revenue collecting and provider-payment mechanism, Canadians have created an efficient health care system with low administrative costs and with a sense of community responsibility.

Canadians have also preserved the opportunity for patients to exercise free choice in selecting a physician. Conversely, we in the United States have watched our choices become increasingly circumscribed. Shockingly, the "managed competition" construct with which so many are enamored would lead to even greater constraints for more Americans. Surely our Canadian friends must be confused by the behavior of this "bastion of free enterprise."

But that's not the way it has to be. We can build a better system. In that system major responsibilities related to administration and accountability would be turned over to government, not to the insurance industry. I would hope that the president's plan would delegate important responsibilities to the various states, both because the states are closer to the people and their needs and priorities and because the states will provide laboratories for what might be turned "natural experiments." Who of us, after all, can presume that there is one single "best" way of organizing care across America's geographic, economic, and demographic diversity and that it can best be determined in Wash-

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ington? There is much that states can do. Nevertheless, states cannot really fund universal insurance without federal financial assistance. It is time for a new kind of federalism, a federalism that may help reestablish the elements of trust of government and of community.

There are many details to be added. We benefit from the fact that we are not the first nation to reform an existing health care system. We can fill in the details out of a well-known and rich experience. It is not the knowledge base that has been missing but the willingness to take bold steps. That is what the battle about the president's health program will be about. Will he dare to break free from the incrementalism that has characterized previous efforts? Will he press his economists for more than marginal change? Will he reject those who will tell him that Canada is fine, but that the Congress wouldn't adopt such a different approach for the United States? Will President Clinton, who knows how important this issue is to the success of his economic program and of his presidency, lead or be led?

We must keep articulating our goals and keep pressing for a truly comprehensive program. There will be those who would compromise and settle for something better than what we now have. Unless we hold fast for something as good as we deserve, unless we keep talking about universality, public administration, tax support, full medical and health care benefits, elimination of cost-sharing and the paper work that accompanies it, freedom of choice of health care provider, we will lose the battle even before it is fought. It is time for the people to be heard, time to drown out the voices of the naysayers, the incrementalists, and the economists who fail to grasp the difference between a social good like health care and the other goods and services produced in the American economy. □

Desmond Morton

HEALTH INSURANCE IN CANADA

MISSISSAUGA, ONT.

In the American debate about health insurance, Canada's version (called somewhat confusingly "Medicare" and so referred to in this article) is often cited by supporters and opponents alike. Pennsylvania Senator Harris Wofford won election in part on his promise to introduce a Canadian-style system. Would-be Democratic presidential candidate Paul Tsongas insisted that in Canada he could never have had the scarce and expensive medical treatment he needed—although he seems to have been ignorant of the fact that the procedure was developed and available in Toronto and elsewhere. George Bush decorated his election campaign with medical horror stories that turned out on investigation to be largely the invention of feverish speechwriters.

Like any institution managed by humans and fueled by money, Canada's version of socialized medicine has its flaws and failures, but Canadian voters regard their health delivery system as a civic right. Pioneered by the socialist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and its successor, the New Democratic Party, Medicare is based on a plan recommended by a Conservative-appointed royal commission and implemented nationally by the Liberals. During the furious national debate over the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA), opponents warned that Medicare might be a casualty. The pro–free trade Conservatives were sufficiently alarmed that they brought Mr. Justice Emmett Hall, the revered architect of the system, out of retirement to proclaim that Medicare would be unaffected. Whether or not the aged judge was

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right, the symbolism was significant. Canadians needed to be reassured about Medicare before the FTA would be accepted.

Administered by ten provincial governments, regulated and partly financed by the national government, Canada's health insurance system pays for basic medical and hospital bills for all Canadians. Precise coverage varies by province, with some offering assistance in the cost of pharmaceuticals, surgical appliances, and home nursing to the elderly and chronically ill. Though Medicare has critics who think Medicare costs too much and others, mainly health professionals, who want more spending, it remains by far the most popular of Canada's social programs.

Inspired by Lloyd George's early ventures in health insurance in Britain, Canada's Liberal party promised national health insurance in its 1919 platform and again in 1945. But the first real steps were taken in the wheat-belt province of Saskatchewan, where rural communities routinely hired doctors and developed hospitals and other health facilities for local taxpayers. The CCF victory in Saskatchewan in 1944 led to the first province-wide hospital insurance plan in Canada in 1947. Opposition soon faded, the plan spread, and by 1960 some 99 percent of Canadians were covered by government-run insurance against basic hospital bills, though private plans continue to offer additional coverage for private rooms and loss of income.

In 1962, after years of planning and debate, the same socialist government in Saskatchewan introduced a medical-care insurance plan. This time, opposition was fierce. Backed by the organized medical profession in the rest of Canada and the United States, Saskatchewan doctors offered every imaginable argument against "state medicine." The CCF government won a popular mandate for Medicare and stayed on course despite furious opposition from physicians and their backers. On July 1, 1962, 90 percent of them closed their offices and went on strike for twenty-three days. As part of the settlement, the government agreed to pay doctors on a "fee-for-service" basis, allowing doctors to control the pace of their work and, incidentally, increasing the "paperwork" that doctors had professed to deplore. Although some doctors still hated the system and a few hundred left Saskatchewan, others saw the benefits, and most reported much higher earnings. By 1965, the physician-population ratio had actually increased slightly over 1962. Whatever their attitude to socialism, Saskatchewan voters liked Medicare.

So would other Canadians. In 1964 and 1965, a federal royal commission headed by Mr. Justice Hall of Saskatchewan, originally appointed in 1961 by the Conservatives, reported to Lester Pearson's Liberal government that Canada needed and could afford a national medical-care insurance plan. Hall's report, with its impeccably conservative credentials, coincided with a period of national prosperity and self-confidence. Despite opposition from some provinces, doctors, and insurance companies, Medicare was adopted in Canada's centennial year, 1967. Ottawa agreed to pay half the cost of any provincial plans that met five principles: accessibility, universality of coverage, portability from province to province, comprehensiveness of services, and government administration. By 1972, all ten provinces had joined. In 1980, Mr. Justice Hall reviewed Medicare, found 97 percent of Canadians covered, and reported that Canada had, "by world standards, one of the very best health services today." Despite complaints that costs were rising out of control, he could argue that Canadians paid far less for a universal health care system than did Americans for a system that left twenty-four million people without any protection. The 1983 Canada Health Act met his few criticisms. It reiterated the original principles and penalized provinces that charged "user fees" for essential services or allowed doctors to bill patients for more than the Medicare rate. When Ontario banned "extra-billing" in 1986, many doctors closed their offices. They soon found that public opinion was so strongly against them that they returned. Medical associations bargained with provincial governments on behalf of their members and, in some provinces, have secured binding arbitration.

Medicare is expensive, but so is the standard of health and hospital care that Canadians expect. Moving health costs from private to public purses involves U.S. $40 billion a year. Most Canadian provinces spend a third of their budgets on health and hospitals. Medicare is fi-

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nanced by premiums and, increasingly, by extra taxes. Since 1982, Ottawa has limited its contribution to provincial Medicare bills, but costs keep rising. High-tech medicine and an aging population with bigger health needs keep pushing Canada's medical bill higher. In the current recession, failing revenues have forced governments to control costs through community-based health care, caps on doctors' earnings, reductions in hospital beds, and an emphasis on personal fitness and prevention. Ontario's social democratic government has forced hospital mergers, encouraged the training of midwives, and capped payments to citizens who journey south to explore private enterprise medicine in the United States. Some provinces are rethinking coverage of prescription drugs for seniors, optometry, physiotherapy, and chiropractic treatment.

Doctors, hospital administrators, pharmaceutical firms, and other medical interest groups say Canada should be spending more on health; few want free-enterprise medicine again. In fact, most Canadians think Medicare gives them a big advantage over Americans. For about 8 percent of their gross national product (substantially less than Americans spend) and a possible wait for a non–life threatening operation, Canadians have no worries about medical or hospital bills. Struggling to be neutral on a highly politicized question, *Consumer's Guide* had trouble finding fault with the Canadian system when it compared costs and benefits with American experience.

Normally, since the 1920s, Canadians have been more likely to imitate American institutions than provide their neighbours with persuasive examples. Despite Mr. Justice Hall's assurances, some Canadians fear that Medicare might vanish as an unacceptable bump on the "level playing field" of North American free trade. Already the right-wing Reform party insists that universal health insurance is a luxury Canadians cannot afford without heavy deterrent fees for users. Corporate Canada has backed the multinational drug companies in their bid to eliminate low-priced generic pharmaceuticals. The U.S. belief that health care, from "miracle drugs" to heart transplants, is a product to be sold to the highest bidder could be contagious. For those on both sides of the border who believe that health care is a social right, best financed, like defense and environmental protection, from the common wealth, Canadian experience proves that it can be done well and economically, but only if all five of Canada's principles are respected. Any break in the dam guarantees runaway costs for patients or the community. □

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THE EDITORS □

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Martin Kilson

CLINTON AND THE "RACE ISSUE"

Clinton's strategists—both white and black—were well aware of the need for any successful Democratic presidential candidate to win back a significant number of "Reagan Democrats" (upper working-class and new middle-class white ethnics). Helping Clinton to place the Reagan Democrats at the center of the campaign was the goal of Thomas and Mary Edsall's curious book *Chain Reaction*. I call the book curious because, though penned by two ostensibly progressive intellectuals, *Chain Reaction* spooned up a lot of cynical formulations regarding the racial issue that almost amounted to advising Democratic candidates to "Willie Hortonize" their way back into the White House.

Two shrewd liberal southern politicians like Clinton and Gore didn't really need the Edsalls' formulations to guide their campaign. They had their own understanding of America's pathological racist legacy—an understanding leavened by a sensitive grasp of how racism has ravaged African American lives. Clinton and Gore also had a keen sense of the moral limits that liberal and progressives must always apply to their pragmatism, moral limits not apparent from my reading of *Chain Reaction*.

Consequently, while the Clinton-Gore campaign refrained from anything approaching an embrace of the Reverend Jesse Jackson—evoking many complaints from Jackson about being neglected—Clinton and Gore nevertheless worked closely with mainstream black leadership groups (civil rights leaders, clergy, mayors, and leading black congresspersons such as John Lewis of Georgia and Charles Rangel of New York, among others). And during the last several months of the campaign the Clinton machinery allocated at least $5 million to Jackson himself for registration and voter-turnout activity. In short, they did *not* "Willie Hortonize" the racial issue.

The Clinton-Gore ticket gained a landslide in the electoral college but only a plurality in the popular vote (43 percent to Bush's 38 percent and Perot's 19 percent). Bush won the white vote over Clinton, 41 percent to 39 percent; Perot garnered 20 percent of the white vote. So a strong majority of the white voters again deserted the Democratic candidate, but this vote was split among two conservative candidates, thereby weakening the white vote's ultimate impact.

This splitting of the white vote was not in itself enough for a Clinton victory. A strong black vote for Clinton was absolutely necessary, and he got it: some 82 percent of the black vote went to the Clinton-Gore ticket. Only the Jewish vote (78 percent) matched the black vote for Clinton, and the Latino vote came in a strong third (62 percent), with the Asian-American vote lagging badly (35 percent). But more important perhaps than the overall black vote for Clinton was the role of that vote in key states. Electoral analysts consider the black vote responsible for Clinton's narrow victories over Bush in Louisiana (46 percent to 42 percent), Georgia (44 percent to 43 percent), New Jersey (43 percent to 41 percent), and Ohio (40 percent to 39 percent).

Projecting the future character of the Clinton administration's interaction with African Americans and their major problems (poverty, inner-city education, and family crises, high unemployment, and so on) depends partly on one's understanding of the importance to Clinton's victory of the black vote. And it depends even more upon how one understands

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the nature of Clinton's liberalism. Is it a narrow realpolitik liberalism, hangdog in its deference to establishment pieties? Perhaps, but I think not. I would rather characterize Clinton–Gore liberalism as pro-active or innovative—pragmatically respectful of establishment verities but also prone to test and extend their boundaries. This is the kind of liberalism that progressive intellectuals can both respect and accommodate, as Irving Howe recently observed in the *New York Times* Op Ed page.

C. Vann Woodward, writing in the February 1, 1993 issue of the *New Republic*, offers an approving view of Clinton as a narrow realpolitik liberal. Woodward takes the issue of affirmative action and looks for comments from Clinton that reflect support for civil rights policies but, in Woodward's words, "make no separate case for the rights of racial minorities." Another feature of the establishment liberal characterization of Clinton is a tendency to make disparaging comments about those among Clinton's allies who believe that a careful use of preferential treatment in affirmative action is as democratically legitimate as the preferential treatment involved in longstanding affirmative assistance policies like subsidies and tax benefits for, say, all kinds of farmers (wheat, dairy, tobacco, and so on) or for a variety of businesses. As Woodward puts it:

> Clinton will undoubtedly be challenged by sincere advocates of preferential discrimination—depending on how far his administration goes in reversing the policy. There are likely to be conflicts to be resolved between the old-style Democrats (like his wife, Hillary, and her close friend Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund), who strive to expand welfare benefits, job training, free health care and help for disadvantaged black people; and the new-style Democrats (like Clinton himself and his friends at the Democratic Leadership Council), who . . . speak of . . . learning from mistakes of their past and the experience of conservatives.

In a similar vein, Michael Barone, in the February 1 *U.S. News & World Report*, gets a bit shrill in warning President Clinton about "Clinton's Enemies On The Left."

My reading of Clinton's liberalism as pro-active differs fundamentally from Woodward's perspective. Though Clinton's experience in the Democratic Leadership Council involved a turn toward political pragmatism, Clinton nonetheless salvaged a key element of pro-active liberalism. Above all Clinton *morally leavened* his quest for a new Democratic demeanor that would return Democrats to the White House: he refused to sacrifice the Democratic party's soul on the neoracist altar of "Willie Hortonism."

Clinton has, I think, made it clear that Democrats must keep the American system true to its moral obligations to black folks. Which means, of course, America's moral obligation to close the mobility gap between blacks and whites that has its origins both in slavery and in four generations of vicious institutional marginalization of blacks in American life. In short, in our racist legacy. It is precisely this moral leavening that is absent from the establishment liberal view.

I cannot, of course, predict a full innovative liberal trajectory for the Clinton administration in regard to racial issues. Such a projection would be naive. Yet I think there are already features about the Clinton administration that suggest that we can expect a serious endeavor toward pro-active liberalism in regard to black-related policy issues.

For one thing, as Andrew Hacker points out in a recent issue of the *New York Review of Books*, the Clinton administration, influenced by Professor William Julius Wilson of the University of Chicago, is seeking to deracialize a variety of issues that touch on black American concerns. For example, job training programs will be designed without any racial labeling, as are day-care and Head Start programs.

Progressive allies of Clinton and Gore (allies like Marian Wright Edelman and Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute) know well the importance of deracializing these policy areas. They know that Clinton's lifespan as an innovative liberal president will depend on his bringing into the Democratic voting column large numbers of the politically inert white poor

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(some fifteen million Americans) as well as the white working class. Policy deracialization, while in no way harmful to black concerns, will facilitate this goal.

Finally, the Clinton administration has staked out for itself a distinctly activist liberal posture on the diversity issue. For instance, the new Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, has favored advancing diversity on our campuses by restoring federal scholarship loans designated for minority students—a policy heavily restricted by the Bush administration.

Clinton's progressivism on the diversity issue is also evident in the virtually revolutionary composition of his cabinet. In addition to three women, including the first woman attorney general, the Clinton cabinet has four African Americans and two Hispanic Americans. None of the black cabinet members holds a "token black" post (for example, HUD). Three hold posts relating to systemic economic processes (Commerce, Energy, and Agriculture) and all hold positions relating to processes basic to all class levels among African Americans.

President Clinton's boldness in selecting this cabinet is not the stuff of establishment liberalism. A *U.S. News and World Report* poll (January 12–13, 1993) found that 75 percent of Americans approve of Clinton's "giving priority to women and minorities for high-level positions." Clinton understands something about today's America that conservatives and establishment liberals fail to grasp—that America cannot fulfill its democratic destiny without first fulfilling its moral obligation to its maltreated citizens, African Americans, and that in the core of American society there is a growing desire to fulfill our democratic destiny, especially in regard to women, blacks, class equity, and the environment. □

Bogdan Denitch

TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC FOREIGN POLICY

The great danger for the foreign and defense policies of the new Clinton administration lies in the "new" folks' widespread temptation to try to act statesmanlike by producing a high degree of bipartisan continuity with Bush's dismal policies. Les Aspin's desire to act "responsibly" as the secretary of defense, that is, not to offend by anything like adequate cuts in the now mostly obsolete military budget, does not augur well. Nor does the high number of appointments from well established and conventional foreign policy think tanks and defense lobbyists. This is, let us remember, a distinctly centrist Democratic administration and therefore, at least, one should be grateful that notorious hawks associated with the AFL-CIO cold-war obsessed internationalist wing did not get the appointments they expected, at least thus far.

The early successful offensive by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their allies in the Senate like Sam Nunn around the issue of eliminating discrimination against gays in the military has weakened any likelihood that major restructuring in defense budgets, doctrines or policies will take place. Once burned, in an ill-timed, although probably inevitable confrontation with the military, Clinton's people will be even more cautious than their centrist politics would lead them to be in challenging military budget orthodoxies.

Even more important is the issue of doctrine, that is, the long-range defense policies of the United States. We should demand that clearly stated doctrine, agreed on after a substantial and open debate, dictates what defense systems will be required, and that these requirements in turn determine what is an appropriate defense

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budget. The present practice, much exacerbated by widespread military-industrial pork barreling, has historically reversed this process, at least since the Second World War. Doctrine has been figured out as a post-factum justification long after the military got all the weapon systems the market would bear.

Clearly a whole host of major issues will have to be faced soon. For example: can the United States defend its current policy of refusing to place its troops under multilateral UN command when intervening in humanitarian or brush-fire actions? Is it in the genuine interest of the United States that it assume the role of a world policeman? Would this not place a burden of excessive and therefore all too often disappointed expectations on the United States? Should it not rather emphasize the building of a genuine international peace force capable of effectively intervening in the Cambodias, Bosnias, and Sudans of this world?

Under such circumstances clearly the U.S. military's weapons systems would be radically different from those designed essentially for superpower confrontations. Thus, for example, nuclear submarines, much of the heavy armor, and strategic air-force might become redundant while quite possibly the Marines and light infantry divisions, including the Airborne, might well need to be built up. In any case that defense policy debate is overdue, and the only good news is that Ron Dellums, a sophisticated critic of military and defense policy dogmas, has become the chairman of the House Armed

Help Democratic Socialists in Croatia

The democratic socialist Social Democratic Union (SDU) of Croatia, headed by Professor Branko Horvat, faces continued repression by both the authorities and informally organized superpatriots. Its initial organizing convention in the spring of 1992 was broken up by thugs and then prohibited by the police for "safety reasons."

Throughout the summer election campaign for the Croatian Parliament the SDU candidates were exposed to intimidation. On December 17 one of SDU's trade union leaders, Milan Krivokuca, a member of the party's executive committee, was stabbed to death on his doorstep. The police did not find the guilty parties, but a statement was issued to the effect that this was not a politically motivated crime! In January of this year one of SDU's candidates for local elections was suddenly mobilized and, although previously classified as an army telephonist because of poor eyesight, was reclassified as a sniper and sent directly into the enemy line of fire. Two SDU members had their cars dynamited in front of their homes in January 1993. A campaign to dismiss a leading tenured SDU member, Professor Milan Pupavac, as well as a well-known friend, Professor Zarko Puhovski, is now underway in the Faculty of Philosophy of Zagreb, previously a stronghold of Marxist-humanist praxis. SDU's members have been dismissed from jobs in the media, the economy, and civil service. They have been arbitrarily denied citizenship papers together with masses of Albanian, Serbian, and Gypsy long-time residents of Croatia. The party has great problems in finding places willing to rent space for meetings and in raising even minimal funds to keep its paper and activities going. It desperately needs help from friends abroad. Even worse repression takes place in Serbia, particularly in Kosovo, and horrible violations of human rights and mass rape take place in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nevertheless we ask *Dissent* readers and sympathizers to help our fellow democratic leftists in Croatia because it is essential for any prospect of a decent postwar society that democratic socialist, nonnationalist organizations survive. Help should be sent to:

Institute for Democratic Socialism
15 Dutch Street, Rm. 500
New York, N.Y. 10038

Checks should be made payable to: IDS-Yugoslavia Fund, and they are tax deductible.

—B.D. □

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Services Committee. Dellums is more likely to provoke a long overdue major defense policy debate than anyone else in Congress.

The Reagan-Bush years were even worse on North-South issues than on domestic policies. The same ideological drive that led to a sharp drop in wages of working Americans in the name of ever greater "competitiveness" has had a catastrophic effect on the third-world South. The already intolerable income gap between the North and South of a decade ago has increased sharply. Much of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union now threaten to slide into the third world. The search for ever cheaper labor has led to an assault on the crude welfare states in former Communist-ruled countries. The devastated former Communist economies are now competing with a desperately impoverished South for ever scarcer resources. The resources are scarcer in good part because the American treasury has been impoverished by feckless tax cuts for the rich and corporations combined with huge allocations for defense and growing interest payments on an ever increasing debt. This debt, we on the left must continue to remind an electorate with notoriously short memories, was quite consciously created by the Reagan administration precisely in order to limit the ability of the federal government to spend on either domestic or international programs. That formula for hobbling welfare state measures at home and decent aid policies internationally must be undone if the new administration is not to remain a hostage to the Reagan years.

Much of the damage is the result of conscious ideological policies crudely based on the monetarist teachings of the Chicago School imposed through U.S. pressure on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The universal formula imposed on the whole South and former communist countries is seemingly simple and has been applied with the same dogmatic rigidity that "state socialist" models were applied earlier. Countries in the South are told (as are the former communist countries) that in order to get any financial aid they must cut the cost of their already low-paid labor further.

These goals were to be accomplished by cutting social spending, freeing the prices of commodities, especially those of basic food and energy, and encouraging the private sector. Inefficient state-owned industries were to be privatized at any cost and their "surplus" workers dumped.

Unsurprisingly these policies have resulted in a great deal of corruption, mafia-like collusion between the new entrepreneurs and the state as well as massive dissatisfaction of the majority of those employed and increased misery of the growing numbers of people who have become unemployed. People unfortunate enough to be on fixed incomes, including pensioners and much of the civil service, face catastrophic conditions. These generalizations are drawn from places as different as Russia, Argentina, Ukraine, Brazil, Nigeria, and Tanzania. More to the point, democracy itself is in deep peril in these countries as long as they attempt to follow the economic prescriptions of the international financial institutions and the hordes of mostly U.S.-based economic advisers. No regime can keep enforcing these policies and remain popular and democratic.

To insist on such economic policies as a condition of aiding the South or the former communist-ruled countries is to push mightily in the direction of turning these into authoritarian, at best authoritarian-populist regimes. However, given the present twilight of universalist programs and values, any populist regime would most likely turn to aggressive nationalism as an ideological underpinning.

There is also a narrower reason for reversing past policies, which should carry some weight with progressives and democratic socialists in the advanced capitalist countries. Cheap labor in the third world is a threat to the social and ecological standards of the more advanced countries. Bluntly stated, cheap labor in postcommunist countries, the South, and China are supposed to lower the costs of labor in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Japan.

Today American corporations have discovered that they can build a new fertilizer factory in China, pay workers $40 a month and engineers $80, sell the fertilizer to Japan and amortize the factory in one year. Everything else is gravy for the stockholders and managers. They do not even have to

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bother with union-busting, since that will be taken care of by the Chinese communist regime. For much the same reason they do not have to worry about safety, health, or bothersome ecological standards. This in part explains why, all violations of human rights notwithstanding, the Bush and Reagan administrations were so gentle with China.

There are some good portents in the economic appointments of the new administration that will have a long-range impact on North/South policies as well. One of the best signals is the appointment of Professor Laura Tyson from Berkeley to chair the Council of Economic Advisers. That is a position that tends to set the direction of overall macro-economic policies. Tyson is not a member of the Chicago school of economics. She is not even a captive of the free-trade orthodoxies of the past decades.

We must work to change the present international policies of the United States, and that means to insist that defense of human rights must include the right of workers to organize their own unions, freedom of press and other media to criticize their regimes, and the right of opposition including new leftist and socialist parties. But democracy has no chance if it is linked to grinding poverty and a drop in already low living standards. That is why generous aid must be provided to help in the transition to democracy. This means a defense of basic rights of the peoples in the South and post-Communist countries. These rights cannot remain confined to the privileged ghettos of the developed North. □

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Jo-Ann Mort

WHAT LABOR WANTS—AND NEEDS

As interest groups lobbied the Clinton transition team for cabinet appointments and Clinton groped for "diversity" in his cabinet, one group was noticeably silent—organized labor. Appointing Robert Reich as labor secretary was a good start, clearly linking labor's fate to the nation's economic future. Organized labor today is about as weak as it was before Roosevelt's New Deal instituted a new era of labor standards, with the Wagner Act and the National Labor Relations Act. Approximately 12 percent of the private sector work force is organized; the figure goes up to 16 percent when public-sector unions are included. President Clinton needs a revived labor movement to "grow" the economy—and labor must change to adapt to a new economic landscape.

The most immediate item on the unions' agenda is job creation—high-wage jobs with good benefits. These must be family-friendly jobs. Early passage of the Family Medical Leave Act was a step in the right direction (though most working men and women can't afford the unpaid parental leave provided for in the act). There must also be a national commitment to affordable and safe child care for working parents.

Clinton must keep his pledge to raise the minimum wage and index it to inflation. People who work full time at the minimum wage should be able to live above the poverty line.

According to the latest Children's Defense Fund survey, over thirteen million U.S. children live in poverty. Over 40 percent of them are children of parents who are thirty years old or younger—the new workers who came of age in the Reagan-Bush era, without benefit of unions or high wages.

These workers also need an apprenticeship program. Clinton campaigned on a pledge to make U.S. business pay a 1.5 percent retraining tax, a pledge he and Labor Secretary Robert Reich have put on hold, suggesting that persuasion, rather than legislation, might be the first step.

But, the experience of the last decade should be cause enough not to trust the benevolence or good judgment of American business. Contrast a volunteerist approach with the German model and with proposed European Community legislation, which legally entitles workers to lifetime training.

The German model is worth examining in other ways. Even with its current economic problems, Germany still boasts the most unionized, militant, high-wage industrial work force and some of the most progressive labor laws in the world.

The cornerstone of the German system is "co-determination," whereby workers and shareholders have an equal number of representatives on supervisory boards in large enterprises. Empowering workers and giving them a real investment in the enterprise is part of what makes the German corporations competitive.

Labor-management cooperation can help U.S. corporations thrive. Xerox regained market share after cooperating with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union to achieve a more competitive workplace and stop the practice of contracting out work. The General Motors Saturn plant, where GM and the UAW have instituted employee-involvement arrangements, produces one of the fastest-selling cars in the U.S. market.

Unless workers have genuine input into work reorganization, and unless they feel reasonably certain about job security, pensions, and the possibility of retraining, they will be reluctant

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to take the risks that will come with modernizing U.S. industry. Workplace health and safety laws must be strengthened.

The fire that left twenty-five workers dead in a Hamlet, North Carolina, chicken-processing plant in 1991 shows the inadequacy of our current patchwork of health and safety laws. Rural and urban sweatshops, all too prevalent in the United States, have no place in a competitive economy.

Nor do trade laws that force U.S. workers to compete with child labor and low wages in Mexico and the rest of the third world. Unlike the North American Free Trade Agreement negotiated with Canada and Mexico by former President Bush, the European Social Charter *raises* the standards for workers in the European Community (EC). For instance, the Social Charter legislates fourteen-week paid maternity leave for workers and includes "social cohesion funds" provided by the richer states like Germany and France for the poorer partners in the EC like Spain and Portugal. Twenty workers' councils already exist across national borders in Europe, uniting workers in multinational corporations in cooperative bargaining efforts, even though mandatory legislation is being stalled in the EC. The attempt to raise economic and social standards for all workers in the trading bloc is the exact opposite of the Bush-negotiated treaty.

Labor laws must be updated to give workers a fighting chance to have their own representation. Without more liberal labor law, the chances for labor's resurgence are almost nil.

Considering labor law reform as an afterthought or a reward to faithful allies misses the point—unions are good for productivity. As labor economists like Richard Freeman have shown, unions *increase* productivity in the workplace.

For specific changes in our labor laws, we can look to Canada, where union membership has risen in similar numbers to the U.S. decline. Canadian law takes some of the social strife out of union-management relations. For instance, if over 50 percent of workers in a plant sign union authorization cards, the union is automatically recognized.

Contrast this with the U.S. where, after signing pro-union cards, workers must take part in a long election process with management effectively controlling the terms of the debate. And even when workers gain union recognition, several years and millions of dollars in litigation can be spent before a company finally signs a first contract. Canada has first contract arbitration, which assures that workers' democratic wishes will be met.

Two other changes in the labor laws were advocated by candidate Clinton: the outlawing of permanent replacement workers in strikes—commonly known as scabs—and the repeal of 14B, the federal "right-to-work" statute. Both of these changes would help stop the U.S. corporate practice of treating our nation's workers as enemies.

The CIO helped shape Roosevelt's New Deal. The CIO of the next century will look profoundly different from the labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s, but basic issues of democracy and fairness still must be tackled if our economy is going to carry us into this new era. □

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Richard Rothstein

UNIONS AND THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

Bill Clinton is the first Democratic president in modern times to be elected without strong union identification. At no time during the campaign did he even hint at interest in labor-law reform (beyond a perfunctory visit to Caterpillar picket lines and the expression of support for legislation outlawing permanent striker replacements). Yet the Clinton administration may sponsor far-reaching reform of the nation's labor laws, attempting to establish what Labor Secretary Robert Reich has referred to as a "level playing field" between unions and management.

Today, fewer than 12 percent of America's private sector workers are represented by unions, a steady decline from nearly 40 percent in the mid-1950s. Indeed, unions today represent a smaller share of the American work force than they did before the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1935. This development threatens the Clinton administration's economic plans, which aim to create "high-wage, high-skill" jobs and force industry to abandon its obsession with short-run profit indicators. Unionism's decline encourages American business to pursue low-wage strategies. Those seeking an explanation of the administration's apparently sympathetic stance toward union organizing should look more to the competitive advantages of collective bargaining than to purported political debts owed organized labor by President Clinton.

Reich has announced a commission to examine labor-law reform. Implicit in this call is a "deal": the administration apparently wants organized labor support for NLRA amendments to encourage upgrading the technology of American industry. It is hard to computerize the workplace, for example, without expanding the realm of employee decision making and blurring the distinction between workers and supervisors. In return, the administration may be willing to endorse amendments to encourage union organization.

Conventional economic wisdom contends that unions hurt the competitiveness of American industry. Unions, academic economists assert, generally insist on rigid work and seniority rules that prevent industry from responding flexibly to international competition. Further, union demands for wage increases frequently put unionized firms at a competitive disadvantage against foreign firms with lower labor costs—especially in industries where higher wages were previously based on market power now eroded by international competition. Thus, these economists believe, unions may cause the loss of American jobs in unionized sectors.

On the other hand, Clinton and his advisers want to rebuild a strong manufacturing sector in the United States. They often speak of a need for more high-wage manufacturing jobs, and they decry the decline in wages that manufacturing workers experienced during the Reagan-Bush years. They offer a sophisticated defense of many labor market interventions that unions traditionally support and that, arguably, raise labor costs—for example, family leave legislation, a requirement that firms subsidize

We welcome comments from informed readers that agree or take issue with some of the ideas expressed in this article — EDS.

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worker education and training, and mandatory employer-provided health care.

The challenge facing unionists will be how to present the case for labor law reform so that increased union membership can be shown to be consistent with initiatives like family leave or expanded worker training, rather than with featherbedding or uncompetitive wages.

To understand how such a case can be made, we should first explore the new Democratic economic outlook. It goes something like this: *In the Reagan-Bush era, America adopted the false economic theory that deregulated markets could generate prosperity for the entire nation. But instead of prosperity, we got declining living standards, reduced wages and family incomes, and a loss of international competitiveness. This was because selfishness and profit maximization led to a corporate focus on short-term results while our international competition was forswearing immediate rewards to invest in technological advances and future market share. We now find ourselves trying to save jobs in competition with China, the Caribbean, and Mexico, by lowering our wages and living standards. But we have barely begun to learn how to compete with Germany and Japan by raising our wages, investing in the skills of our work force, and gambling that we can again succeed with creativity and ingenuity.*

President Clinton, for example, has moved beyond the sterile debate over George Bush's persistent demand for an across-the-board capital-gains tax break, by distinguishing between tax giveaways to those who speculate for quick returns on the one hand, and those, on the other, whose investments are made from a patient commitment to see new technologies bear fruit. Thus, Clinton has proposed a capital gains tax cut of his own: investors who risk their savings on new businesses (which create jobs) should receive a 50 percent tax exclusion for gains on assets held more than five years. Clinton has also proposed eliminating tax deductibility for excessive executive compensation, and this pledge is also tied to his emphasis on revival of long-term business thinking. In the 1980s, the biggest companies raised executive pay by four times the percentage that their workers' pay went up and three times the percentage that their profits went up. As a result, the average CEO at a major American corporation is now paid about a hundred times as much as the average worker, compared to ratios of twenty-three to one in Germany and seventeen to one in Japan. Reining in our excessive executive compensation levels is necessary for reasons of basic fairness, but this reform also has two important economic bases: First, it is hard to imagine how a firm with such a disparate salary distribution can inspire worker loyalty and effort, which is necessary for world-class competition. And second, exorbitant executive pay schemes usually include stock-option provisions that encourage managers to focus not on the firm's long-term position but on the opportunities for stock run-up in the next several quarters. Although many of these option schemes were touted as enhancing executives' commitment to future performance, in practice they have permitted early exercise of options and measures to immunize executives against downturns.

The largest Japanese businesses, whose high-quality products have won shares of many of our markets, make extraordinary commitments to their workers. Though not all Japanese workers have lifetime guarantees of employment, many of those working for Japan's largest firms are retained during sales downturns and, when permanent loss of markets makes jobs redundant, they are placed in other jobs in the firm's related companies.

In the eighties, however, American firms have gone in the opposite direction. Convinced that international competition requires near total flexibility, American firms have reduced the security of our working people. American workers' jobs were sacrificed when firms restructured in the leveraged buyout frenzy, when bankruptcy courts set aside their union contracts, when plants closed because a new location (often in a low-wage third world country) promised lower costs, or because of the recession of recent years. In addition, American corporations have made work less secure by using more part-time workers or by leasing rather than hiring employees.

Just as American business must have a

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longer term perspective than it had in the quick-buck eighties, so must American workers. American industry will never be able to call on its most valuable asset, the knowledge and experience of its workers, if those workers don't have greater job security than they do now. It is in this context that Clinton's strong support for the family leave bill, vetoed twice by Bush, is significant. The new law requires only about 5 percent of all employers (those with firms having at least fifty employees) to give their workers up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for a sick or troubled parent or child or a newborn infant. The bill makes sense as family policy, though it is only a first step, since it makes no provision for income protection for workers who take advantage of this right, and many workers will not be able to afford it when their families are in crisis.

Yet the law is significant for another reason. It may make it more difficult to operate a business with maximum short-term efficiency, since there are essential workers whose positions need to be filled at all times. Family leave, therefore, implicitly requires businesses to cross-train workers to fill in for others on leave. Cross-training is expensive. Conservative economic theory would have us believe that if cross-training were profitable, market imperatives would force business to undertake it. But this, according to the new Democratic view, is myopic thinking. Market forces alone have not compelled business to plan for long-term success. The family leave bill restructures incentives, so that American business is required to take small steps in two directions: first, giving workers somewhat greater security so they know their jobs will not disappear after an unforeseen family emergency; and second, giving employers somewhat greater incentive to train workers to be more flexible and have greater understanding of the overall production process. The debate around family leave offers a model for how the case for labor-law reform should be presented.

As late as 1970, 31 percent of all American and 37 percent of West German workers belonged to unions. Yet, by 1987, U.S. membership had shrunk to 17 percent while West Germany's had grown to 43 percent. During this time, West Germany sustained a trade surplus with the United States. While its unions gained strength, Germany's economy grew at an average per capita rate of 2.4 percent a year.

Switzerland, like the United States, had a union density of 31 percent in 1970. By 1987, Swiss union membership was 33 percent. Swiss growth averaged 4.6 percent, nearly triple the U.S. rate, and, as a result, Swiss per capita income rose to $30,000 by 1989, compared to $21,000 for the United States. Canada's economy grew at an average 4 percent rate while unionization went from 32 percent to 36 percent. On the other hand, while American unions declined, our economy grew at only a 1.6 percent annual rate. Clearly there is something missing from the facile assumption that nonunion industry is more competitive than industry in a unionized environment.

These data lend credibility to findings that union labor in America, in many cases, is more, not less productive than nonunion labor. In 1978 economists Charles Brown and James Medoff compared "value added" per production employee per hour for different manufacturing industries; they found unionized firms' productivity to surpass nonunion firms' by over 20 percent. Analyses of particular industries have also confirmed a similar advantage. Carnegie-Mellon economist Maryellen Kelley recently surveyed over a thousand U.S. metalworking and machine tool plants. She found that in corporations where union and nonunion plants did the same type of work, the organized workers' average production time per unit of output was 33 percent less than nonunion workers' time.

The reasons are not hard to fathom. Turnover is lower where workers have job security (such as seniority rights and protection against arbitrary layoff), which means more experienced and thus more efficient employees. Union contracts give managers incentives to enforce work rules consistently. Efficiency may be lost when union firms can't easily correct or fire unproductive workers, but greater efficien-

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cies are lost in nonunion plants where poorly trained supervisors, fearing loss of loyalty, overlook absenteeism or low output of favored employees.

These data, comparing plants using similar work methods, may understate the union productivity advantage. Organized plants also use more advanced technology because they have higher pay than nonunion plants. High-cost labor leads firms to invest in machinery that doesn't waste workers' time.

With higher wages in union plants, it is true that corporate profits are lower. Do unions thus impede economic growth, since lower profits make fewer funds available for investment? They do not, because funds for U.S. capital investment now come, to an important extent, from over $2 trillion in private pension funds. Unions place a high priority on negotiating pensions, so that although union members make up less than one-sixth of the work force, roughly half of private pensions are for union workers. Despite lower profits in union plants, pension funds make unions a net contributor to national savings.

Unions also increase productivity because employee involvement in quality is greater in union plants. In the 1970s, a wave of nonunion firms initiated "quality circles," attempts to mimic Japanese success in getting workers to take more responsibility. Yet most such efforts failed: many firms adopted "quality circles" only as temporary measures to defuse worker discontent that might otherwise invite union organizing. Workers in nonunion "quality circles" were often unwilling to speak their minds, fearing retaliation or discharge. They also hesitated to suggest more efficient methods, fearing their jobs would become redundant. In the 1980s, however, some unions began to promote worker involvement, including work teams and bargaining about capital investment or product design. Not only do these union members not fear reprisals for suggesting reforms, but a few unions have negotiated job security guarantees in return for cooperation in implementing efficiencies. These innovations resemble the productivity-enhancing "works councils" of West Germany, legally mandated (and usually union-dominated) participation structures. In the United States, union-sponsored worker involvement has been found to make greater contributions to productivity gains than "union-free" quality schemes.

In 1978 labor law reform passed the House of Representatives and gained the support of 58 Senators. It was killed by a filibuster. Since then, unions' influence has waned, American workers' average earnings have dropped to $345 a week in 1990 from $388 a week in 1979 (in 1990 dollars), and American industry has lost markets to nations like Germany, which have a technological edge—in part because their workers participate in decisions that affect their firms' success, and because their employers have greater incentives to invest in the upgrading and training of workers.

Labor-law reform proposals that emerge from Reich's commission will almost certainly go beyond the 1978 focus on organizing rights. They will likely try to enhance the likelihood that employers will make greater investments in technology and in worker training. Reform of labor law, to be consistent with a new union role in an advanced economy, should have several facets:

I. Involving Workers and Their Unions in Long-Term Firm Decisions: First, the law must become biased in favor of employee and union participation in a firm's decision making. Several reforms are relevant:

- We need to redefine what subjects are mandatory for bargaining. At present, mandatory subjects are limited mainly to economic conditions of employment. In a reformed labor law, product quality, market strategy, and internal pricing should also be mandatory bargaining subjects. Insistence on a "management's rights" clause that excludes worker involvement in these decisions should be defined as an unfair labor practice.
- To encourage greater responsibility on the part of union leaders who become involved in this broader collective bargaining, a labor-law reform agenda should revive the Labor-Management Cooperation Programs (LMCP) of the Department of Labor. The Bush administration's last budget "zero-funded"

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these programs. Workers cannot be expected to make intelligent collective bargaining decisions, in which wage and benefit improvements are balanced against needs for investment in plant or technology, if those workers and their representatives are not conversant with their firms' long-term market opportunities and the technologies available for meeting them. To address this problem, the Labor-Management Cooperation Programs of the Department of Labor should have an expanded mandate—establishing institutes to provide union representatives with the financial skills needed to evaluate capital investment plans. These institutes should be tripartite, directed by representatives of labor, management, and academic business schools. Graduates could be awarded certified competencies to engage in the more sophisticated collective bargaining required in the 1990s.

• With an expansion of mandatory bargaining subjects, unions may have to accept some restrictions in their right to strike. If we argue, for example, that workers and unions must be involved in a firm's decision making, it becomes more difficult to preserve a union's right to use the confidential information it obtains in a "corporate campaign" that aims to destroy that firm's market share. Arbitration of contract disputes, with authority granted to representatives of the public as well as to labor and management, may be one form in which the right to strike could be modified.

There was a noteworthy development in the U.S. Senate debate last spring about striker replacement legislation. A last-minute "compromise" proposal by Republican Senator Robert Packwood may have had greater significance than the striker replacement issue itself. The majority-supported Packwood amendment would have banned permanent replacements only if an employer rejected settlement recommendations made by a government "fact-finding" panel. Permanent replacements would also have been permitted if a union refused panel recommendations.

The Packwood amendment, had it been adopted, would have been the first time federal labor law imposed sanctions on an employer (or union, for that matter) for unreasonable contract demands. Although in this case the sanction was not terribly significant (permitting the hiring of temporary but not permanent striker replacements), the concept opens the door to true reform where society asserts broader interests against shortsighted management or labor behavior.

• Labor-law reform should repeal the 1980 *Yeshiva* decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that faculty members at a private university were not "employees" within the meaning of the NLRA because they participated in management decision making about hiring colleagues and similar matters. As labor relations expert Charles Hecksher remarks, "What that decision says is that any employee who has the discretion to think on the job, whose job has not been reduced to mindless routine, is excluded from the framework of representation." This decision took labor law in exactly the wrong direction. The logic of reversing *Yeshiva* may also mean, however, that unions will have to accept increased participation of first-level supervisors and foremen in bargaining units. And, as a consequence of these changes, unions may have to fashion a different kind of appeal to win majority support in organizing campaigns.

II. Expansion of Union Organizing Rights: A second facet of labor-law reform covers the expansion of organizing rights. We can't have a new kind of union contract to promote flexible and participatory workplaces if we don't have any unions. A first step should be changes in the NLRA to facilitate union organizing. In the 1970s, unions organized 200,000 workers a year. In the 1980s, in an increasingly imbalanced legal climate, organizing success fell to less than half that.

In recent decades, it has become excessively difficult for employees to achieve union representation. The National Labor Relations Board's rules for determining employee choice have, over the last fifty years, increasingly shifted the scales towards the rights of employers to discourage unionization and away from the rights of workers seeking collective bargaining. There are several issues to face in redressing this imbalance.

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• Equal access to employees and their workplaces where union election campaigns are taking place is necessary. This includes the right of union organizers to equal time for responses to employer speeches before captive audiences on paid working time; and the provision of name, address, and phone lists of workers to union representatives at early stages of an organizing campaign.

A similar proposal was also part of the 1978 congressional reforms. The necessity for such access should be obvious. Most union organizing campaigns today are defeated in significant part by professionally prepared speeches, slide shows, and films, shown during paid working time to employees required to attend; by small group meetings with professionally trained management consultants; and by one-on-one "conversations" with trained consultants. Meanwhile, the unions are restricted to efforts by their internal volunteer committee, who may speak about the union only during nonworking time; or by professional organizers spending endless time tracking down employees at their homes after work. Resistance to the notion of giving union representatives access to the workplace to respond to employer speeches, films, or meetings has always been based on respect for employers' private property rights. However, this is not a constitutional but a legal issue. The familiarity that public policy now has with public campaign finance laws (which also provide for certain legislated equality in access to voters) perhaps makes this concept more acceptable in a union organizing context.

• There must be a speed-up in NLRB procedures. Under NLRB procedures, justice is often denied by lengthy delays, sometimes created by employer attorneys who file appeals over frivolous issues. Elections should be held no more than thirty days after the filing of a petition.

• There must be effective remedies for unfair labor practices, and more reasonable standards of proof for unions protesting unfair labor practices. There are fewer effective or timely remedies in present law for workers who are fired or discriminated against for attempting to organize unions, and NLRB rules often permit employers to effect pretextual discrimination without penalty.

The law should be reformed to require the Board to find an unfair labor practice where an open and public union activist with standing (say, two years' service) is disciplined or discharged during or shortly after a union organizational campaign, unless the activist is discharged for serious misconduct. Under present Board law, the NLRB is required to expedite investigations only of unfair labor practice charges filed against unions, that is, illegal picketing. If the regional director of the NLRB finds a violation, he or she is required to seek an immediate judicial injunction. In contrast, when charges are filed by unions against employers, it can take months before the NLRB regional director decides whether to dismiss them or issue a complaint; and years before final adjudication.

• Several 1978 proposals addressed the issue of more serious penalties for unfair labor practices. At present, the penalty for most unfair labor practices is only the posting of a notice by an employer stating a commitment to obey the law in the future. In discharge cases, the penalty is only back pay, minus interim earnings. This penalty is much too weak.

The NLRB should have authority to order punitive damages, both to victims of discrimination and to unions, in the case of unfair labor practices. Perhaps victims of discrimination should also be permitted to recover damages in civil suits.

• Reasonable procedures for recognition of union bargaining rights should be instituted. In several Canadian provinces, union recognition is automatic if a majority of workers sign union authorization cards and become members of the union, where there are no provable allegations of unfair union conduct in an organizing campaign.

• Effective remedies where employers refuse to negotiate a first contract after a successful union organizing campaign are also needed. Under current law, employers must "negotiate in good faith" about the terms of employment. Employers are not required to agree to any particular proposal, no matter how reasonable,

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so long as the employer is willing to bargain with a union until "impasse" has been reached. Increasingly in the 1980s, employers took militantly regressive positions in first-contract negotiations, prepared to bargain endlessly without making concessions. This is a gray area, and a matter of increasingly restrictive regulatory interpretation—where to draw the line between lawful "hard bargaining" and unlawful "bad faith" bargaining. Further, even where an employer is found by the NLRB to have engaged in "bad faith" bargaining, the only remedy within the Board's power is to order that the parties resume bargaining in "good faith"; the Board cannot normally order the inclusion of any element in a contract. There are a few exceptions to these NLRB rules. Employers must, in a contract, agree to limited rights for a union to process grievances about the terms and conditions of employment, must afford employees representation in disciplinary matters, and must agree to permit union representatives access to working areas for the purpose of investigating grievances. Unlike other substantive matters, the Board will require an employer to agree to these provisions because they are considered to be inherent in the union's status as the employees' exclusive representative. The list of provisions to which employers can be required to agree should be expanded. The list should include union security and dues check-off provisions. The Board should also be empowered to find that, in first contracts, an employer's proposals to reduce existing wages and benefits may, in many cases, be an unfair labor practice.

III. Future Oriented Thinking by Union Officers and Pension Fund Trustees: A third facet of labor-law reform includes provisions that require unions to exercise their powers with the same long-term perspective that we want to require of management.

• One way to accomplish this is to reconsider the provisions of ERISA, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, which require pension fund trustees, many of whom represent union members, to adopt the same short-term profit maximization strategies that have hobbled American finance in the 1980s. We should require that union and joint labor-management pension funds invest a small, though meaningful, share of their assets in the firms that employ plan participants. And we should redefine the standards of trustees' and plan managers' fiduciary responsibility so that pension fund investments can be used to insist on long-term and socially responsible perspectives for public corporations. One of the most tragic consequences of the casino atmosphere of the 1980s was that our notions of fiduciary responsibility prevented even union-controlled pension funds from defending participants' long-term interests against irresponsible short-run profit maximizing decisions taken by corporate managers. The spectacle of workers' pension funds getting a "free ride" on stock run-ups stimulated by leveraged acquisition battles (battles that ultimately destroyed the participants' own jobs and livelihoods) symbolizes the limits of that narrow perspective.

A labor-law reform agenda for the 1990s cannot return unions to their glory days of the 1940s. The American economy cannot return to its glory days of the 1940s, either. If America is to establish a successful place in the new international economy, however, unions must be part of these new directions. Unions represent our nation's best attempt to give democratic voice to those who do the work. Democracy in the workplace is an effective way to improve productivity. Labor-law reform and a redefined and expanded union role, therefore, could be a central part of the Clinton administration's new economic agenda. □

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Fred Block

REMAKING OUR ECONOMY

New Strategies for Structural Reform

Across the political spectrum, there is an absence of serious and persuasive ideas for reviving and rebuilding the U.S. economy. Bill Clinton's advocacy of extensive federal investment in infrastructure, training, and education is a vast improvement over anything else on the horizon, but it represents only a first step. The economy needs reforms on the scale of the New Deal, but Roosevelt and his Brain Trust were able to draw on a rich vein of bold reform ideas that had previously been advanced by Progressive and Socialist reformers and intellectuals. Today's left has failed to produce a comparable body of ideas.

This essay is intended as part of a broader effort to make up this deficit. It seeks to sketch out a series of structural reforms that could contribute to both a stronger economy and increased democracy and equality. But first it is necessary to reconsider some of the intellectual assumptions that shape our thinking about the economy and our vision of the good society.

Many on the left continue to hold on to a vestigial Marxism that sees the economic realm as somehow "more real" than everything else; with all kinds of subtle qualifications, they retain the idea that the economy is determinant in the last instance. However, the economy does not have a necessary logic of its own; it is only a set of practices that appears to be coherent because we share certain cultural beliefs. The claim, for example, that the broad outlines of the society are determined by the search for corporate profit is unpersuasive on two grounds. First, there are many different strategies by which corporations can attempt to increase their profits—sweating workers and smashing unions is only one of a range of options now being pursued. Second, the calculations of what is profit and of how much profit is enough are themselves the products of prior assumptions that vary significantly across countries.

Yet this same argument also points to a radically different conclusion. Although the economy is not determinant in bourgeois society or any other society, economic ideology does play an extraordinarily central role in market societies. When we ask why we cannot have more democracy or more protection of the environment, the inevitable answer is that it would interfere with the efficient workings of the market. Similarly, when we ask why women cannot be paid the same as men or why we cannot spend more money to combat the AIDS epidemic, the answer is that as a society we simply "cannot afford" to do these things. In short, when social movements of the left demand institutional changes, resistance to those changes is based on the claim that they would be economically irrational.

Winning gains for these movements rests—in part—on their ability to challenge this dominant economic ideology. The movements need to show that these assertions about what we cannot afford or what would be economically irrational are rooted in "claims of false necessity," which are intellectually incoherent and empirically unsustainable.

The left should devote a portion of its

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energies to this critique of economic ideology. Yet critique without some sense of alternative is ultimately empty. Hence, the next step is to move beyond the false dichotomy of plan versus market to imagine the broad range of possible institutional structures for organizing the economic dimension of society.

The left's suspicion of markets is rooted in the romantic critique of commodification and an underlying nostalgia for feudalism. Yet these traditions mislead because there is nothing inherently wrong with buying and selling things at prices determined by a market. To be sure, not everything should be sold on the market—human beings, medical care, and the attention of politicians are some of the obvious exceptions. However, the task is not to eliminate markets but to block certain types of socially undesirable exchanges while regulating those that are organized through markets. To be sure, market participants sometimes exercise coercive power over others, but effective regulation can limit the extent of coercion in markets.

Contrary to the utopianism of both classical liberalism and classical Marxism, the idea is not to make all allocation dependent on either the market or "the plan," but rather to combine markets with various forms of regulation to achieve desired ends. Across the developed market economies, there are distinctly different institutional arrangements for providing health care, for organizing scientific research, and so on. We can draw on these experiences to imagine new institutional arrangements that could assure a highly productive economy without compromising democracy, equality, and the protection of the environment.

The last step is to move beyond broad visions of alternatives to imagine the specific institutional arrangements of a new kind of society. Our insistence that claims of necessity are false rests on the argument that there *is a better way* to do things in which we would not have to engage in one of the false choices—for example, protecting jobs or having a clean environment—that defenders of the present system insist are inevitable. It is not until we have imagined the institutional framework of a better kind of society and have persuaded millions of people that ours is an attractive vision that we can expect any radical social change.

To be sure, this process of designing blueprints forces us to confront the danger of totalitarianism—the risk that even a well-intentioned vision of a good society could degenerate into dictatorship. It is for this reason that the blueprints must be thoroughly pluralist. This means retaining many of the inherited techniques for avoiding the concentration of power while also inventing new ones. It involves, as well, rejecting the implicitly totalitarian dream of a New Socialist Man or Woman in favor of a multiplicity of visions of what it is to be human.

The blueprint must be based on reformist principles, so that the bounds of what is possible within the existing society are being pushed forward step-by-step. While this does not eliminate hard choices about political priorities, it eliminates the radical separation between the present and the future that troubled the Marxist tradition.

An Alternative Vision

In constructing an alternative economic vision, it is necessary to establish some principles of design—what do we want this new institutional structure to do? My own starting point is to combine a highly productive advanced economy with institutions that would give much broader scope to democracy, equality, personal liberty and autonomy, and environmental protection than existing arrangements.

But why can't we have more democracy, more equality, more liberty, and a healthier environment within our present institutions? The classic answers of the left—the anarchy of the market, private ownership of the means of production—are no longer adequate because they flow from a vision of a socialist alternative that is now empty of content. A somewhat different answer is that the central flaw in our current institutions is the exercise of class power by those who own and control most of the society's productive wealth. It is this

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exercise of class power that restricts and narrows the range of democratic politics. Not only are major structural reforms kept off the political agenda, but even minor reforms—higher corporate taxes, tighter environmental regulation, labor law reforms—are rarely advanced because capitalist interests insist that they will have dire economic consequences.

This restriction in the scope of democratic politics exacerbates each of the other problems. Institutional reforms to create more equality—across class, gender, and racial lines—are made far more difficult by the obstacles to measures that would redistribute resources from the rich to everyone else. The environmental regulations that we have are not the result of a broad democratic debate but rather those that people have the courage to support in the face of economic blackmail—the threat that tighter regulations will lead to a disappearance of jobs and economic opportunities. Even in the sphere of personal liberty, our ability to support reproductive freedom or to eliminate the stigmas on gay lifestyles are limited by resource constraints that are, in turn, linked to the exercise of class power.

If rich people simply had one vote like everybody else, there would be no problem. They would make their arguments for less redistributive taxation, for fewer rights for employees, and for less environmental regulation, and they would likely lose every vote. The problem, of course, is that they exert disproportionate influence over politicians through campaign finance and through their control over the economy. Although the former channel of undue influence has been closed in some democratic societies through legal reforms, the latter remains a potent weapon to limit democracy.

In this exercise of power, we encounter again our old friend—the prevailing economic ideology. People of wealth do not simply say, "Please do not increase taxes on our incomes and on the corporations because we do not like it." They insist instead that higher taxation will damage the overall economy; it will lead to inflation, higher unemployment, or trade deficits. But the most important point is that if they happen to lose this battle, and their taxes are raised despite their warnings, they usually have the ability to make their predictions come true. By slashing new investment, they can push up unemployment or they can raise prices faster than they previously planned to increase the rate of inflation. Then they can go back and say, "We told you so," and the likely result is that they will win the next round. The strategy works even if the logic of their economic arguments is deeply flawed.

Are there institutional reforms that could eliminate this systematic exercise of class power? The four reforms proposed below would leave many of our existing institutions untouched, but they could radically diminish the exercise of class power by the wealthy. They could broaden the sphere of democratic politics and create a terrain on which struggles for equality, for the environment, and for liberty would have far broader opportunities for success.*

Campaign and Registration Reform

This is familiar territory. The modest post-Watergate campaign reforms in the United States have been a total failure. Political Action Committee (PAC) money from corporations and business associations has corrupted the Congress, and loopholes in the law allow substantial flows of "sewer money"—large contributions by individuals directly to the political parties to finance presidential campaigns. Public funding for all federal offices, the elimination of PACs, free time for candidates on television and radio, and a $100 contribution limit could help restore an even playing field. At the same time, universal voter registration and Sunday elections would help to overcome the current class bias in electoral participation.

* These reforms would also contribute to the kind of highly productive economy that I analyze in *Postindustrial Possibilities: A Critique of Economic Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For a fuller discussion of these reforms, see "Capitalism Without Class Power," *Politics & Society,* September 1992.

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Restructuring the Corporate Form

The U.S. corporation is one of the last bastions of dictatorship on earth. A board of directors that is—in theory—chosen by the shareholders appoints a chief executive officer (CEO) who has virtually absolute power over the firm. A CEO is often able to stack the board with friends and supporters, eliminating the last legal barrier to unlimited power. Even when the board is not in the CEO's pocket, the CEO's power is still formidable. The CEO decides on the fate of the firm's managers; any of them can be thrown overboard for crossing the big boss. The CEO also decides which of the firm's divisions are sold off, which are exploited as "cash cows," and which are targeted for future growth.

This dictatorial form makes it far easier for corporations to exert economic blackmail. If the CEO is persuaded that a particular government initiative—increased regulations or higher taxes—is undesirable, he or she acting alone has the power to cut back the firm's investment plans. If fifty of the CEOs of the largest firms reach the same conclusion, they can put a powerful brake on the entire economy.

Since the message of the revolutions of 1989 is that dictatorship is inferior to democracy, it is time this lesson was also learned in corporate boardrooms across North America. The most reliable means to transform the firm from dictatorship to democracy is to restructure the corporate board to make it represent a variety of different constituencies. This could be done by requiring all corporations above a minimal size to incorporate at the federal level, and the federal statute would mandate a board chosen as follows: 35 percent of the board members by the shareholders, another 35 percent by the employees, and the remainder by other constituencies—bondholders, creditors, suppliers, consumers, and advocates for the natural environment.

With no single constituency able to dominate the board, the firm's direction would be shaped by an open process of debate. Since employees would also need open political debate to choose their representatives, discussions among employees would interact with debates within the board. The result would be that CEOs would be much more like democratic leaders than dictators; they would have to develop convincing rationales for their choices. This broader debate and discussion should measurably improve the quality of executive decision making.

On issues of central concern, the CEO would no longer be able to decide unilaterally to slash the firm's planned investments in response to what he or she perceived as an unfavorable business environment. The board would consider such cutbacks long and hard, and it would be likely to question the rationale behind economic blackmail. For example, why should the firm cut back its investment plans just because of higher taxes on rich people? The board might well decide that this is precisely the time to increase investment so as to gain market share from competitors who might reduce the size of their investments.

New Banking Institutions

Though our democratized firms would be willing to invest at high levels, the commercial and investment banks that provide them with capital might be unwilling to lend. This is another important way in which class power is exercised: those who control the flow of money engage in "strategic nonlending"—the refusal to make capital available for certain activities in certain political circumstances. It is well known, for example, that employee-owned firms often find it extremely difficult to borrow money even when they have good collateral and good prospects. By their reluctance to finance "deviant" organizations, the bankers reinforce the idea that the dictatorial corporate firm is the only way to do business. Moreover, bankers as a group are even more effective at exercising economic blackmail. When the major commercial and investment banks start cutting back sharply on loans and new underwritings in response to government policies that they do not like, they also have the power to bring the economy to a halt.

The solution here is to make the banking industry more competitive so as to reduce the opportunities for the collusive behavior that underlies strategic nonlending. The federal government can do this by launching ten new

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commercial banks and ten new investment banks that would operate as semipublic entities. These banks would be insulated from partisan interference, but they would be subject to government oversight to assure that they fulfill their mandate to lend money in the public interest. The government would provide the banks with their initial capital, and they would compete with private banks to raise money on the capital markets and to find customers in need of finance.

From the start, these new banks would be oriented toward long-term results and sustained cooperative relations with their clients. In our current financial institutions, money managers are rewarded for their successes in producing high quarterly returns on their portfolios. In these new banks, money managers would be rewarded for nurturing productive enterprises over five to ten years. In short, these new banks would play a role that is similar to the role of banks in the German and Japanese economies.

Although this proposal could have significant economic benefits, the greatest payoff would be in reducing the possibilities of economic blackmail. If private banks reduce their lending activities, the public banks could be expected to step in aggressively to steal those clients. This would make it far more difficult to launch an investment strike against government policies. Moreover, the public banks would be less likely to discriminate against "deviant" borrowers such as employee cooperatives and local governments engaged in productive investment.

Capital Controls

Even with all of these steps, wealthholders and firms would still be able to sabotage the economy through capital flight. Here again, they have the power to make their prophecies self-fulfilling. They argue that if the government pursues its redistributive course, it will damage the investment climate and lead to a huge shift of capital abroad. And if the government persists, lo and behold, the predicted capital exodus takes place. The resulting balance of payments crisis is usually enough to force governments back into line.

For this reason, it is essential to eliminate this weapon from the arsenal of wealthholders. This can be done by a system of internationally negotiated stand-by controls on capital flight that require countries to return capital that has moved abroad in violation of a nation's laws. Since such returned funds would be confiscated if the owner was convicted of illegal capital exports, such an internationally sanctioned system would provide a powerful deterrent. It is significant that the early drafts for the IMF (International Monetary Fund) agreement written in the Roosevelt administration contained provisions for precisely these measures to assure the return of illegal flight capital.

Still, objections to capital controls might be raised on grounds of economic efficiency, liberty, and practicality. The efficiency argument is that in an integrated world economy, capital must be able to flow across international lines in response to market signals. However, it is possible to have open and vigorous international trade including complex networks of cooperation among international firms operating in different countries without huge and continuing capital flows. If IBM wants to build a new facility within the boundaries of the European Economic Community, it can borrow the needed money in Europe, and the same goes for Japanese or European-based firms. Moreover, requiring that such investments be financed with locally raised capital will help to preserve the ability of national or regional monetary authorities to use interest-rate policies for macroeconomic stabilization.

It is only for investment in less developed countries and the former Soviet bloc that these restrictions on capital export would significantly interfere with commerce. However, the experience of market-mediated capital flows to the Third World has been disastrous. Third World countries in the aggregate have been net exporters of capital. This shows that the market mechanism cannot assure that finance flows to the regions where it is most needed. To assure positive capital transfers to poorer regions requires reducing the role of market flows and reorienting the activities of international development agencies. In short, a new regime governing international capital flows could be developed that

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combined reduced mobility for private capital and new mechanisms for assuring real capital transfers to developing areas.

The argument from liberty is that taking away someone's ability to shift $100 million of wealth from dollars to deutsche marks interferes with basic rights. However, rights and liberty are rooted in political communities, and such communities must be able to keep their members from engaging in behavior destructive of the social fabric. If the costs to the larger community of allowing full capital mobility are too high, there is every reason to restrict the exercise of that right.

The practicality arguments assert that such capital flows cannot possibly be controlled and that an international agreement to establish such controls is highly unlikely. The first argument rests on the idea that if technology has made something easy to do, then it cannot possibly be regulated. Since new technologies make it easy to shift a billion dollars from one country to another in a few seconds by typing on a keyboard, then it is impossible to prevent people from carrying out such electronic shifts of capital. However, the technological ease makes it all the more important that such flows be carefully monitored by regulatory authorities.

This was, after all, the lesson of the Bank for Commerce and Credit International (BCCI) scandal. The new technologies meant that thieves operating in the cracks between national banking regulations could steal billions. The looting that occurred in the United States in the savings and loan scandal that was made possible by lax regulation will continue to happen internationally on an even larger scale if national authorities do not cooperate to regulate international capital flows. In a word, international electronic fund transfers make more oversight a necessity, and with that increased oversight, the range of legitimate capital transfers could be narrowed.

But what of the prospects of international agreement? The reality is that U.S. enthusiasm for international laissez-faire is not shared by many in Europe and Japan, or by much of the Third World. The dangers of the free international movement of capital are understood abroad much better than they are in the U.S. If the U.S. position on international capital mobility were to shift, the prospects would be good for negotiating a new international regime governing capital movements. Such a regime would be resisted by nations or islands that have built their economies as tax and banking havens, but the risks to the world economy of unregulated banks operating in such locales are now so great that the resistance could be overcome.

I leave it to others to judge whether these four reforms could be implemented in the foreseeable future. The critical point is that if we imagine a society that had made these four reforms, its politics would be radically different from our acquired conceptions of both "socialism" and "capitalism." There would still be private ownership of the means of production, but the degree of "privateness" of control over corporate property would be greatly diminished by the need to create effective governing coalitions out of different constituencies. At the same time, the ability of private wealthholders to prevail in political conflicts would be greatly diminished because they could no longer credibly threaten to pick up their marbles and go home. All of this could be accomplished without centralizing control over investment decisions in the hands of the state.

In this new political space, a democratic citizenry would have far more freedom to shape the economy as it wished. The decision as to how much emphasis to place on the protection of the environment could be made without a threat of economic blackmail. People would no longer have to see the amount of leisure time or the quality of the jobs in the economy as factors over which they had no control. Tradeoffs would remain; increasing leisure time or cleaner air might mean diminished output. But the citizenry would gain the ability to decide how much of one variable to trade against the other. That they would make the right choices is certainly not assured, but that danger is inherent in democratic government. After all, the great virtue of democracy is that it gives us the capacity to learn from mistakes. □

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Todd Gitlin

THE RISE OF "IDENTITY POLITICS"

An Examination and a Critique

The rise of "identity politics" forms a convergence of a cultural style, a mode of logic, a badge of belonging, and a claim to insurgency. What began as an assertion of dignity, a recovery from exclusion and denigration, and a demand for representation, has also developed a hardening of its boundaries. The long overdue opening of political initiative to minorities, women, gays, and others of the traditionally voiceless has developed its own methods of silencing.

At the extreme, in the academy but also outside, "genealogy" has become something of a universal solvent for universal ideas. Standards and traditions now are taken to be nothing more than the camouflage of interests. All claims to knowledge are presumed to be addressed from and to "subject positions," which, like the claims themselves, have been "constructed" or "invented" collectively by self-designated groups. Sooner or later, all disputes issue in propositions of the following sort: the central subject for understanding is the difference between X (for example, women, people of color) and Y (for example, white males). P is the case because my people, X, see it that way; if you don't agree with P, it is (or more mildly, is probably) because you are a member of Y. And further: since X has been oppressed, or silenced, by Y—typically, white heterosexual males—justice requires that members of X, preferably (though not necessarily) adherents of P, be hired and promoted; and in the student body, in the curriculum, on the reading list, and at the conference, distinctly represented.

This is more than a way of thought. Identity politics is a form of self-understanding, an orientation toward the world, and a structure of feeling that is frequent in developed industrial societies. Identity politics presents itself as—and many young people experience it as—the most compelling remedy for anonymity in an impersonal world. This cluster of feelings seems to answer the questions, Who am I? Who is like me? Whom can I trust? Where do I belong?

But identity politics is more than a sensibility felt and lived by individuals. It is a search for comfort, an approach to community. The sense of membership is both a defense and an offense. It seems to overcome exclusion and silencing. Moreover, in a world where other people seem to have chosen up sides and worse, where they approach you—even menace you—because you belong to a particular group, it seems a necessity to or find or invent one's strength among one's people. From popular culture to government policy, the world has evidently assigned you a membership. Identity politics turns necessity to virtue.

But there is a hook: for all the talk about "the social construction of knowledge," identity politics in practice slides toward the premise that social groups have essential identities. At the outer limit, those who set out to explode a shrunken definition of humanity end by shrinking their definitions of blacks or women. In separatist theory, they must be, and have always been, all the same. After a genuflection to historical specificity, anatomy once again becomes destiny. This identity politics is already a tradition in its second generation, transmitted and retransmitted, insti-

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tutionalized in jargons, mentors, gurus, conferences, associations, journals, departments, publishing subfields, bookstore sections, jokes, and, not incidentally, in affirmative action and the growing numbers of faculty and students identified and identifying themselves as "of color."

In this setting, identity politics promises a certain comfort. But what was, at first, an enclave where the silenced could find their voices tends now to harden into a self-enclosed world. In the academy, the pioneering work in the early 1970s toward making women's studies legitimate, bolstering labor studies, rethinking the damage done by slavery and the slaughter of the Indians, opening up the canon to hitherto silenced traditions—all this work was done by scholars who had one foot in the civil rights and antiwar movements and who came to their specialties already bearing something of a universalist or cosmopolitan bent. But much of the succeeding work tended to harden and narrow. Identity politics in the strict sense became an organizing principle among the academic cohorts who had no political experience before the late sixties — those now in their twenties and early thirties. After the late 1960s, as race and gender (and sometimes class) became the organizing categories by which critical temperaments addressed the world in the humanities and social sciences, faculty people working this territory came to display the confidence of an ascending class speaking predictably of "disruption," "subversion," "rupture," "contestation," "struggle for meaning." The more their political life is confined to the library, the more aggressive their language.

But identity politics is not simply a product of the academic hothouse. It also thrives in the society at large — in the media of the mass and the margins alike, in schools and in street lore. Some students carry the rhetoric of their particular group to campus with them. Alert to slights, they cultivate a cultural marginality both defensive and aggressive. Fights over appropriate language, over symbolic representation (whether in the form of syllabus or curriculum or faculty or even cuisine), over affirmative action and musical styles and shares of the public space *are, to them, the core of "politics." Just as these cohorts have their clothes and their music, they have "their politics" — the principal, even the only form of "politics" they know.*

The specialists in difference may do their best to deny the fact that for a quarter of a century, they have been fighting over the English department while the right held the White House as its private fiefdom. But academic currents are not so insulated from the larger social world as parochial theory may presume. The legitimacy of racial animus on a national scale, the boldness of right-wing politicians, the profusion of straightforward race prejudice among students have all made the academic left edgier and more offensive. Affirmative action has been successful enough to create a critical mass of African Americans who feel simultaneously heartened, challenged, and marooned. The symbolic burden they bear is enormous. In the absence of plausible prospects for fighting the impoverishment of the cities, unemployment, police brutality, crime, or any of the economic aspects of the current immiseration, it is more convenient—certainly less risky—to accuse a liberal professor of racism. Identity politics is intensified when antagonistic identities are fighting for their places amid shrinking resources. The proliferation of identity politics leads to a turning inward, a grim and hermetic bravado celebrating victimization and stylized marginality.

The thickening of identity politics is relative. We have to ask, Thickening compared to what? Compared to "universalism," "common culture," "the human condition," "liberality," "the Enlightenment project"—the contrary position wears different labels. I shall group them all (at Robert Jay Lifton's suggestion) under the heading of commonality politics—a frame of understanding and action that understands "difference" against the background of what is *not* different, what is shared among groups. This distinction is one of shadings, not absolutes, for differences are always thought and felt against a background of that which does not differ, and commonalities are always thought and felt in relation to differences. Still,

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the shadings are deeply felt, whence the intellectual polarization that shows up in debates about the complex of problems including the curriculum, diversity, and so on.

The point I wish to assert is that the thickening of identity politics is inseparable from a fragmentation of commonality politics. In large measure, things fell apart *because* the center could not hold. For chronologically, the breakup of commonality politics predates the thickening of identity politics. The centrifugal surge, on campus and off, is the product of two intersecting histories. There is, obviously, the last quarter century of America's social and demographic upheavals. But these, in turn, have taken place within the longer history that snakes forward throughout the West since the revolutions of 1776, 1789, and 1848. Throughout this period and beyond, believers in a common humanity clustered around the two great progressive ideals: the liberal ideal enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and, later, in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; and the radical ideal that crystallized as Marxism.

Such legitimacy as the left enjoyed in the West rested on its claim to a place in the story of universal human emancipation. Two hundred years of revolutionary tradition, whether liberal or radical, were predicated on the ideal of a universal humanity. The left addressed itself not to particular men and women but to all, in the name of their common standing. If the population at large was incapable, by itself, of seeing the world whole and acting in the general interest, some enlightened group took it upon itself to be the collective conscience, the Founding Fathers, the vanguard party. Even Marx, lyricist of the proletariat, ingeniously claimed that his favored class was destined to stand for, or become, all humanity. Nationalist revolutions—from 1848 to the present—were to be understood as tributaries to a common torrent, the grand surge of self-determination justified by the equivalent worth of all national expressions. Whether liberals or socialists, reformers or revolutionaries, the men and women of the left aimed to persuade their listeners to see their common interest as citizens of the largest world imaginable. *All* men were supposed to have been created equal, workingmen of *all* countries were supposed to unite. Historians of women are right to point out that the various founding fathers were not thinking of half the species; yet potentially inclusive language was in place. The power of the discourse of political rights was such that it could be generalized by extrapolation. Thus, within fifty years, women—grossly subordinated in the antislavery movement—were working up a politics based on their constituting half of a human race that had been decreed to share equal rights.

Marxism, in all its colorations, became the core of what may be called the idea of the left—the struggle to usher in and to represent common humanity. There exists, Marx asserts in his early writings, a universal identity: the human being as maker, realizing his "species being" in the course of transforming nature. With the audacity of a German idealist primed to think in first principles, Marx adapts from Hegel the idea that a "universal class" will give meaning to history—though not without help. To accomplish its mission, this class to end all classes requires a universal midwife: the revolutionary. To every particular circumstance and cause, the universal priesthood of communists is charged with bringing the glad tidings that History is the unfolding of Reason. The communist party, like God, has its center everywhere and nowhere. The proletariat is his nation. Like the emigré Marx, he is at home nowhere and everywhere, free to teach people of all nations that not a historical event or a struggle against oppression rises or falls which does not have its part to play in the great international transfiguration.

Such is the lyric of Marxism, the rhetoric that appealed to revolutionaries for a century after the death of the founding father. And therefore Marxism-Leninism, the universalist technology of revolution and rule later codified by Stalinists, is, if not the unshakable shadow of Enlightenment Marxism, at least its scion. Lenin's Bolshevik party thrives on and requires this lineage, even if Lenin and Marx are not identical. Under Lenin, the party, this directive force that sees all and knows all and acts in the ostensibly general interest, becomes the incar-

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nation of the Enlightenment's faith in the knowability of the human situation. Farther down a road already surveyed by Marx, Lenin makes intellectuals essential to the revolution, thereby securing the dominion of universal ideals.

From 1935 to 1939 and again during World War II, the Popular Front could even conjure a new commonality—a cobbled-together anti-Fascist fusion. In the end, Marxists could always ask rhetorically, what was the alternative that promised universal justice, a single humanity? And so, partly by default, from one revision to the next, Marxism remained the pedigreed theoretical ensemble hovering over all left-wing thought. And yet, once the antifascist alliance was broken, the universalist promise of Marxism proceeded to unravel.

From this point of view, the intellectual radicalism of the early sixties can be seen as a search for a substitute universalism. Having dismissed Marxism for what C. Wright Mills called its "labor metaphysic," the New Left tried to compose a surrogate universal. "The issues are interrelated" was the New Left's approach to a federation of single-issue groups—so that, for example, the peace, civil rights, and civil liberties movements needed to recognize that they had a common enemy, the "Dixiecrats" who choked off any liberal extension of the New Deal. More grandly, in a revival of Enlightenment universalism, Students for a Democratic Society's Port Huron Statement spoke self-consciously in the name of all humanity. The universal solvent for particular differences would be the principle that "decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings": that is, participatory democracy. In theory, participatory democracy was available to all. In practice, it was tailored to students, young people collected at "knowledge factories" as the industrial proletariat had been collected at mills and mines; young people who were skilled in conversation, had time on their hands, and, uprooted from the diversities of their respective upbringings, were being encouraged to think of themselves as practitioners of reason. When the early New Left set out to find common ground with a like-minded constituency, it reached out to the impoverished—the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee to sharecroppers and SDS to the urban poor, who, by virtue of their marginality, might be imagined as forerunners of a universal democracy. If students and the poor were not saddled with "radical chains" in the system of production, at least they could be imagined with radical *needs* for political participation.

But the student movement's attempts at universalism broke down—both practically and intellectually. In fact, the ideal of participatory democracy was only secondary for the New Left. The passion that drove students—including Berkeley's Free Speech Movement—was the desire to support civil rights as part of a movement with a universalist design. The New left was a movement-for-others searching for an ideology to transform it into a movement-for-itself, but participatory democracy was too ethereal an objective with which to bind an entire movement, let alone an entire society. Freedom as an endless meeting was only alluring to those who had the time and taste to go to meetings endlessly. The universalist impulse regressed. Enter, then, the varieties of Marxism by which universalist students could imagine either that they were entitled to lead a hypothetical proletariat (Progressive Labor's Stalinism) or that they themselves already prefigured a "new working class."

But these attempts at recomposing a sense of a unified revolutionary bloc were weak in comparison with centrifugal pressures. Such unity as had been felt by the civil rights movement began to dissolve as soon as legal segregation was defeated. Blacks began to insist on black leadership, even exclusively black membership. Feminist stirrings were greeted with scorn by unreconstructed men. If white supremacy was unacceptable, neither could male supremacy be abided. One group after another demanded the recognition of difference and the protection of separate spheres for distinct groupings. This was more than an *idea* because it was more than strictly intellectual; it was more a whole way of

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experiencing the world. Difference was now lived and felt more acutely than unity.

The crack-up of the universalist New Left was muted for a while by the exigencies of the Vietnam War and the commonalities of youth culture. If there seemed in the late 1960s to be one big movement, it was largely because there was one big war. But the divisions of race and then gender and sexual orientation proved far too deep to be overcome by any rhetoric of unification. The initiative and energy went into proliferation—feminist, gay, ethnic, environmentalist. The very language of collectivity came to be perceived by the new movements as a colonialist smothering—an ideology to rationalize white male domination. Thus, by the early 1970s, the goals of the student movement and the various left-wing insurgencies were increasingly subsumed under the categories of identity politics. Separatism became automatic. Now one did not imagine oneself belonging to a common enterprise; one belonged to a caucus.

But note: the late New Left politics of dispersion and separateness, not the early New Left politics of universalist aspiration, were the seed-ground of the young faculty who were to carry radical politics into the academy in the 1970s and 1980s. The founders of women's and black studies had a universalist base in either the Old or the New Left. But their recruits, born in the early or later 1950s, did not. By the time they arrived on campuses in the early seventies, identity politics was the norm. They had no direct memory of either a unified left or a successful left-of-center Democratic party. In general, their experience of active politics was segmented. The defeat of the left was so obvious it was taken for granted. For these post-1960s activists, universalist traditions seemed empty.

The profusion of social agents took place throughout the society, but nowhere more vigorously than in the academy. Here, in black and ethnic studies, women's studies, gay and lesbian groupings, and so on, each movement could feel the exhilaration of group-based identity. Each felt it had a distinct world to win—first, by establishing that its group had been suppressed and silenced; then by exhuming buried work and exploring forms of resistance; and, finally, by trying to rethink society, literature, and history from the respective vantages of the silenced, asking what the group and, indeed, the entire world would look like if those hitherto excluded were now included. And since the demands of identity politics were far more winnable in the university than elsewhere, the struggles of minorities multiplied. When academic conservatives resisted, they only confirmed the convictions of the marginal—that their embattled or not-yet-developing perspectives needed to be separately institutionalized. In the developing logic of identity-based movements, the world was all periphery and no center, or, if there was a center, it was their own. The mission of insurgents was to promote their own interests; for if they would not, who would?

From these endeavors flowed genuine achievements in the study of history and literature. Whole new areas of inquiry were opened up. Histories of the world and of America, of science and literature, are still reverberating from what can legitimately be called a revolution in knowledge. But as the hitherto excluded territories were institutionalized, the lingering aspiration for the universal subject was ceded. A good deal of the Cultural Left felt its way, even if half-jokingly, toward a weak unity based not so much on a universalist premise or ideal but rather on a common enemy—that notorious White Male. Beneath this, they had become, willy-nilly, pluralists, a fact frequently disguised by the rhetoric of revolution hanging over from the late sixties.

New Board Member

We're happy to announce that Anson Rabinbach has joined our editorial board. Rabinbach is a professor of European history at Cooper Union, an editor of *New German Critique*, and the author of *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism* and, most recently, of *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity.*

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Soon, difference was being practiced, not just thought, at a deeper level than commonality. It was more salient, more vital, more present—all the more so in the 1980s, as practical struggles for university facilities, requirements, and so forth culminated in fights over increasingly scarce resources. For the participants in these late-sixties and post-sixties movements, the benefits of this pursuit were manifold—an experience of solidarity, a ready-made reservoir of recruits. Seen from outside as fragments in search of a whole, the zones of identity politics came to be experienced from within as worlds unto themselves. The political-intellectual experience of younger academics could be mapped onto other centrifugal dispositions in post-Vietnam America. Group self-definitions embedded in political experience merged with other historicist and centrifugal currents to form the core and the legitimacy of the multicultural surge, the fragments of the Cultural Left. The idea of a common America and the idea of a unitary Left, these two great legacies of the Enlightenment, hollowed out together.

Thus a curious reversal of left and right. In the nineteenth century, the right was the property of aristocracies who stood unabashedly for the privileges of the few. Today, the aspiring aristocrats of the academic right tend to speak the language of universals—canon, merit, reason, individual rights, transpolitical virtue. For its part, seized by the logic of identity politics, committed to pleasing its disparate constituencies, the academic left has lost interest in the commonalities that undergird its obsession with difference. □

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Günter Grass

ON LOSS

The Condition of Germany

Toward the end of last summer we went to a Danish island, as we have done for years now, looking to put some space between us and our "troublesome fatherland," yet mindful of how quickly and completely such small distance, a mere hop, skip, and jump, can be canceled out, especially in August, the traditional month for crises. The previous year it had been the failed putsch in the disintegrating Soviet Union that dominated our vacation and glued us to the radio. Two years earlier the island setting had been canceled out by the Persian Gulf crisis *qua* media event; we simply could not tune it out. And this year it was Germany that caught up with us.

Actually the island of Møn has plenty of homegrown excitement. From morning till night a sweeping meadow, rimmed by Baltic dunes, enjoys incessant air traffic. Wild geese by the thousands make a stopover there, practicing take-offs and landings. Now and then a heron startles the gaggles of geese out of their languid rest. Constant racket, which eventually swallows itself up. And above the meadow, above the dunes, the skies are always filled with flight patterns, a writing which, when decoded, gives rise to legends. . . .

Last August, however, the sky was as good as empty—only gulls. The dry summer had parched the meadow, closing the spacious airstrip to take-offs and landings. But according to the radio, there was no lack of crises. As if the two events had been mischievously wired in parallel, the athletic triumphs and disappointments in Barcelona provided a running commentary on the daily dying in Sarajevo. The Olympic Games were taking place in Bosnia; the Olympic stadium lay within range of the Serbs' mortars. Reports overlapped. Simultaneous events appeared equally significant. Here medals were counted, there casualties. And the delights of the Olympics turned the horror into a mere subplot. A younger writer, always ready to pack up and go, would probably—or so I speculated—be able to cover both places, seizing control of the narrative situation with gripping words: snipers and female fencers, steroid scandals and blockade-runners, shortened national anthems and the seventeenth futile ceasefire, fireworks here, fireworks there. But all I could manage to get down in my notebook were scribblings on Germany. This damned inertia, like having lead weights in one's soles! On our wild-goose island, we did our best to put the alarming events of this month of crises out of our minds; blackberries were plentiful, after all, and we had fresh fish every day. But as we bundled the flounder heads in newspaper, from between their crossed eyes peeked yesterday's headlines. Later, under the Danish sky, we ate the headless flounder hot from the skillet. It was the beginning of August.

What makes sensitive people so insensitive? Though slightly irritable, we are nevertheless numbed. Even in church the minister remarks that too much is happening at once. Supposedly the glut of information is to blame for the general apathy. Because our society is over-informed, it behaves as if it were uninformed.

This article, slightly cut for reasons of space, is taken from an address the noted German author gave in Munich on November 18, 1992. It appears here with the author's kind permission—Eds.

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Or people ride their hobbyhorses: one person sees only the hole in the ozone layer, another is obsessed with health-care issues. If you grieve too much for the Bosnian refugees, you may neglect to include Somalia and the daily famine victims in your litany. Is the world out of joint, or is it only that the stock market is acting crazy, as it has so often recently?

When the Olympic fireworks died away, for a while Sarajevo occupied center stage uncontested. This was painful, for the other hot spots could do no more than distract attention from this blatant failure of European politics. But even this disgraceful situation, in which the notion of "Europe" was revealed as a chimera, quickly became commonplace. Then news arrived from Germany, confirming once again that August was the month for crises.

Actually nothing new, just the same old stuff in a more extreme form. Over five hundred right-wing radicals repeatedly stormed a residence for asylum-seekers in Rostock-Lichtenhagen. From the windows of neighboring buildings Germans watched and cheered as stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown. That evening Germans saw them on television watching and cheering; some of them may even have recognized themselves.

Actually it was all familiar; this type of effectiveness had already been demonstrated in Hoyaswerda* and elsewhere. A routine had been worked out for transforming xenophobia into violence. This time, too, the police showed understanding for this terse expression of the people's will, and practiced restraint. A bit later the police were busy intercepting left-wing demonstrators. Here they showed greater zeal: this business could not be allowed to escalate. Our vacation radio carried the voices of politicians trying to outdo each other in displays of that easily mimed attitude known as bewilderment.

But then the rest of the world got involved, because as more and more asylum-seekers' residences were set afire, there were witnesses abroad. Clips of howling mobs were disseminated worldwide. The "ugly German" was rearing his head again. Everywhere the headlines read "Rostock." So sitting there on my Danish island I jotted down notes for this address; my usual refuge, a manuscript, with its network of narrative escape routes, was blocked by a landslide. Something decisive had taken place.

Since then Germany has changed. Hoyaswerda could still be swept under the rug somehow, but since Rostock all the solemn declarations that accompanied the euphoria over unification have plummeted in value. Those whoops of triumph that greeted the end of the postwar period and hailed a new beginning, that festive mood that hoisted a unified Germany onto a pedestal—a dozen historians were already sharpening their pencils to write a new chapter in German history—that verbal prostitution so revolting even three years ago: all that has given way to a despondent meekness. Our past has tapped us on the shoulder, identifying us as perpetrators, fellow travelers, or members of the silent majority.

Not that the shock silenced us. Protest was voiced, declarations and appeals gathered signatures. Recently huge rallies were organized to prove that we could still put up resistance. But the government policies of the last three years, which are to blame for this most recent relapse into German barbarity, have not been altered in the slightest, because none of their proponents see anything wrong with them. Meanwhile the individual right to asylum—a jewel in our Constitution—is being put on the auction block to satisfy the instincts of the *Volk*, which the Nazis insisted on characterizing as "sound." Meanwhile the policy of unity without unification is being pushed forward, bringing renewed division, this time based on socioeconomic inequality. And meanwhile neither the government nor the opposition seems willing or able to stop the shameless close-out sale being conducted with the assets of the bankrupt GDR and to take

* In September 1991 in Hoyaswerda neo-Nazis pelted a home for asylum-seekers with bricks as a crowd cheered. No arrests were made.

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concrete steps to equalize the burden borne by the two parts of Germany.

Taking such steps was, and still is, the only right thing to do, for the East Germans spent forty years walled in, constantly spied on, and disenfranchised. They were never offered the option of Western freedom. In unfair measure they, not we, bore the burden for a war that was lost by all Germans. As soon as the Wall fell, this fact should have been acknowledged and acted upon as a matter of priority. We owed them that, not renewed disenfranchisement.

This question of the unfair distribution of the burden has troubled me and caused me to speak out since the early sixties; that is why I addressed the convention of the Social Democratic party (SPO) on December 18, 1989 to call for a "far-reaching equalizing of the burden—due immediately and with no further preconditions."* To finance it I suggested rigorous cuts in military expenditures and a graduated surtax. But, at the time, my party comrades, who apparently believed in miracles, thought Willy Brandt's wonderful promise, "Now everything that belongs together will grow together," would come true without their lifting a finger. This even though it became apparent only weeks after the fall of the Wall that nothing worthwhile was ready to grow on its own, while profiteering was spreading like a cancer. After more than forty years of division, we Germans share only the burden of a guilty past; even our common language fails to produce understanding.

When I finished my speech, it was killed with faint applause, but at least it found its way into the written record of the meeting. A few weeks later, on February 2, 1990 at a congress in Tutzing on "New Answers to the German Question," I defended the proposition that "anyone thinking about Germany these days and looking for an answer to the German Question must include Auschwitz in his thoughts."**

I also warned against creating German unity by slam-bang annexation, and suggested instead a confederation, at least for the present. These comments unleashed a storm of indignation. My speech had touched a raw nerve. I, the "self-appointed pessimist of the nation," the "notorious enemy of Germany unity," was accused of "instrumentalizing Auschwitz," of trying to abridge the Germans' right to self-determination by dredging up this old subject.

I would like to ask my critics, at the time so intoxicated with unity, whether they had any second thoughts when they learned recently that the so-called Jewish barracks at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp had been burned to the ground.

Back in 1990 they were all using the same demented railroad metaphor: "The train has left the station, and no one can stop it." Let me remind them today of the renewed barbarity for which their railroad imagery gave Germans the go-ahead.

Warnings against latent and overt anti-Semitism and about pogroms aimed at gypsies have been overtaken by events. Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Birkenau, where almost half a million Roma and Sinti were murdered, are very much with us again. In Germany today, gypsies are once more being classified as asocial elements. They have become regular targets of violence. Yet no political force seems willing or able to stop these repeated criminal acts.

On the contrary: it is not only, and not primarily, the skinheads who are shattering the democratic consensus of our society with their telegenic theatrics; rather it was certain politicians whose verbal pyrotechnics ignited the subject of immigration and made the desperation of refugees and asylum-seekers a permanent campaign issue. By signaling the end of civilized behavior toward these people, they encouraged acts of violence and murder by right-wing radical groups then forming. Interior Minister Seiters recently negotiated an agreement with the Romanian government. If you read it carefully, you realize that it provides for deporting any Roma who seek asylum in Germany. This policy, and the steady stream of

* "Equalizing the Burden," in Günter Grass, *Two States, One Nation?* Translated by Krishna Winston with A.S. Wensinger (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990).

** Short Speech by a Rootless Cosmopolitan," ibid., and in *Dissent*, Fall 1990, pp. 458–460.

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attacks on the asylum provisions in the Constitution, can be seen as more or less veiled preformulations of the slogan that is now unifying Germany: "Foreigners get out!"

One of these politicians, Volker Rühe, has in the meantime become minister of defense, and behaves as though he were singlehandedly holding the nation together. When I described his activity as secretary general of the Christian Democratic Union as that of a "skinhead with a tie and hair," he dismissed this characterization as tiresome sniping. But I plan to continue pointing out the likeness, because terrorist behavior must not only be recognized for what it is, but also called by name—in the camp of the perpetrators. How can this government be expected to stop the double-dealing it initiated intentionally, and continues to pursue out of abject fear of the *Volk*, with its obstinately "sound" instincts?

The Federal Republic of Germany and its Constitution, the Basic Law, have been handed over to a demolition firm that claims to be engaged in conservation and preservation. The plan to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the first testing of the V-4 rocket in Peenemünde, called off only because of protests from abroad, is just one indication of how far things have gone. When the country's political center lurches to the right, and this development is laughed off instead of being recognized as an existential threat, we Germans had better consider ourselves dangerous—before our neighbors begin to view us as a threat. That is why I have chosen to denounce some of these solid citizens as arsonists, and to name them. That is why I point out that the present crisis in the country has its roots in government policy. That is why my "Address on Germany" must avoid distracting details and excursions into superficial patriotism. Instead, I want to use the question mark to drill down to the deeper layers.

Does no healing herb exist to cure this German tendency to regress? Do ancient runic inscriptions compel us to repeat the past? Must everything, even the miraculous gift of possible union, turn into something monstrous in our hands? Are we, still smarting from the wounds from our last excursion into the absolute, incapable of civil, humane dealings with each other and with foreigners? What do we Germans, in the midst of all our wealth, lack?

These questions I jotted down at the end of August in Denmark. This is a country not noted for excessive friendliness toward strangers. Yet in Denmark the kind of hatred that finds expression in a thirst for murder—such as we witnessed in Hoyaswerda, Rostock, and hundreds of other German towns—is unheard of, hardly thinkable, even under conditions of extreme stress.

In the spring of 1945, when the Soviet armies were pushing westward, many thousands of Germans fled over the Baltic to Denmark, which had been occupied by the Wehrmacht since April 1940. In May 1945 the Greater German Reich finally capitulated to the Allies. It never crossed the Danes' minds to vent their understandable anger or even hatred toward the country that had occupied them in violent acts against the German refugees. On the contrary: though suffering from shortages themselves, they provided for their enemies. The refugees' return to Germany had none of the earmarks of a brutal deportation. I could tell you about refugees from East and West Prussia who not once during their time in Denmark were reminded that they were refugees. By contrast, in the German towns to which they were assigned by the government they experienced persistent xenophobia. Even in those days people were saying, "Go back where you came from!"

The Danes take their high degree of civilized behavior for granted. They do not talk about it, or at most in ironic asides. We Germans, however, despite all our efforts, all our asseverations, have not succeeded in mending the crack in German society's civilized veneer that became visible in 1933.

In the early seventies it seemed reasonable to hope that we could at least fill this crack, if not obliterate it; a push for reform held out the promise that we would finally overcome our social backwardness. But before long extremists on the left were hurling their vituperative slogans against the vituperative tirades of Axel

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Springer's right-wing press conglomerate, and political murder came into style, starting with the attempt on Rudi Dutschke's life. Political opponents were quickly dubbed enemies. When Willy Brandt went to Poland and knelt before the Warsaw Ghetto monument, his act was greeted with scorn, even in the Bundestag. Starting with Konrad Adenauer's 1961 diatribe, intended to insult and injure the former emigré, Willy Brandt was treated as a stranger in Germany, and he remained a stranger until his death; no state memorial service could conceal that fact.

When the young man from Lübeck [Willy Brandt] fled from the Nazis to Norway, and later to Sweden, he requested and was granted asylum. The compromise adopted yesterday at the SPD convention* does not allay my fears. I wish to put the Social Democrats on notice: any SPD member of the Bundestag prepared in the near future to limit the right to asylum that is guaranteed by our Constitution will, by such an act, retroactively strike a blow against all emigrants, dead as well as living—all those who were forced to leave Germany and found a refuge in Scandinavia and Mexico, in Holland, England, the United States. Any vote curtailing the right to asylum that receives a two-thirds majority in the Bundestag will mean a break with the history of German social democracy.

Some people might say, What difference can one more break make? We Germans are used to breaks and splits. Being fragmented has been normal for us—since the Thirty Years' War, at the least. Ambivalence, duality, what one might call the Hamlet syndrome, is part of us, which explains why we are constantly striving for unity, usually in vain, or at too high a cost.

According to this interpretation, being German would mean being split, in every aspect of our existence and consciousness. At the same time, being German would mean suffering from the absence of unity, which in turn explains why we are always preoccupied with ourselves. For this we are ridiculed by our neighbors, who cultivate other, less dangerous, forms of bad manners.

But I have no patience with such simplifications, handy though they may be. In point of fact the West Germans hardly suffered from the division of their country. They actually made it worse, through indifference. Toward the end of the two-state period, many even began to question the significance of June 17**—the national holiday instituted to commemorate a leaderless workers' rebellion in East Berlin, which West German politicians' rhetoric had transformed into a popular uprising. When the prospect of unification suddenly appeared on the horizon, the West Germans were terrified, for in spite of the chancellor's lies, they had a pretty good idea of what it would cost. No, we were not fixated on unity. Perhaps we remembered vaguely from our history that unity had brought us Germans nothing but misfortune.

While preparing for this address last summer I made one note—Germans always go overboard!—that calls for amplification here, in the form of explanation or contradiction.

Do we, whom other countries admire for our earnest efforts to achieve security within our own four walls, really go overboard so badly? Contradictory evidence offers itself. Isn't it true that French and American political scientists and historians—Alfred Grosser and Fritz Stern, for instance—have, when asked, given us a satisfactory grade in political maturity?

Isn't it true that, as far as the western part of the country is concerned, forty years of continuing education in democracy have resulted in an exemplary degree of social

* On November 17 the Social Democrats voted at a special meeting to accept changes in the constitutional provisions on asylum: applicants from countries considered free of political persecution would be sent home; persons denied asylum in another country would not be able to apply for asylum in Germany, applicants who falsified documents, suppressed records, applied under a false name, or were found guilty of a crime would be deported; and communities taking in asylum-seekers would dispense aid in kind rather than cash support. The SPD voted not to eliminate the constitutional provision for asylum and the guarantee that individual cases would be considered on their merit; but that merit was to be determined under the provisions of the 1951 Geneva Convention on political persecution.—Tr.

** Revolt of the workers of East Berlin, June 1953.

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consensus, which seemed to justify our ideological claim to a "social market economy"?

Isn't it true that up to the moment when we regained our national sovereignty we presented ourselves cautiously and modestly to the rest of the world? The economic giant as political dwarf—which explains why boasts like "We're somebody again" and similar posturing immediately brought placating rejoinders that everything was relative and that we should remembers to be humble.

Isn't it true that we made every effort to comply promptly and obediently with any NATO directive, like good defensive players?

And up until the Historians' Debate*—which took place shortly before unification—didn't we bear patiently the burden of the past, the German guilt complex, the shame of a stigma that refused to fade, hoping, to be sure, that some day all that could be laid to rest?

And altogether, don't we prefer to define phrases like "fond of order," "socially tolerant," "willing to compromise," "balanced," to arrogant demands of the "either-or" and "at any cost" variety?

It is certainly correct to say that the citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany seemed to have become civilized, on their own initiative and ahead of their political parties and special-interest groups. Even the harsh tone civil servants customarily employed toward citizens, based on mutual assumptions about governmental authority, had to yield in the face of the admonition "Be nice to one another." People were civil to each other. The past remained a compulsory topic for discussion in schools. To be sure, there were still old Nazis around, externally wedded to the past, in Nietzsche's phrase. But at the end of the sixties, when the NPD, a party of mostly older right-wing radicals, won seats in a number of local parliaments, the democratic left was there, too, and succeeded in reducing the threat to insignificance by confronting, in an open, nonviolent way, the issues the NPD raised. The apparition vanished, the rightist camp fell apart.

* The debate in the 1980s about the nature and sources of Nazism.

At least that is how it appeared. The GDR, by definition avowedly anti-fascist, found itself deprived of a chance to gloat. In the West it seemed reasonable to hope that a last relapse had been survived. The younger generation had at its disposal a democratic preserve, generously equipped with discovery playgrounds, heated swimming pools, discotheques, and sociological expertise on tap. All this afforded the young folks ample comfort and freedom of movement, and held out the prospect of a peaceful, tolerant society based on heavy consumption of youth-oriented products. Styles changed innocuously, and the *Zeitgeist* was god.

But even before the fall of the Wall and the slam-bang unification, the impression that Germany, at least its western part, had been cleansed turned out to be a delusion. Then the bankrupt GDR, with its entire inventory, animate and inanimate, was annexed by the Federal Republic's large chains and energy syndicates, banks and insurance companies. This annexation, cutely dubbed "united fatherland," did away with self-deception once and for all, uncovered the whole pan-German swindle, and—no sooner than we had achieved sovereignty—gave a powerful boost to our tendency to go overboard.

The social consensus, hammered together with such difficulty, at once began to crack at the joints. The modesty we had been trained to display was denounced as hidebound and provincial, and braggadocio became the order of the day. Influential newspapers urged us to jettison the burden of the German past, hitherto a painful component of our self-definition.

Meanwhile the Soviet Union was collapsing, allowing the western camp, and with it capitalism, to declare itself the winner over communism. As pan-Germans, we threw in our lot with the winning side, determined to set everything straight once and for all: there was to be no Third Way or even democratic socialism from now on. Renunciation of utopian ideals was prescribed like a cure for worms. Even where no real market existed, the free-market system was imposed with narrow-

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minded dogmatism. And the democratic left was to be removed from the picture entirely, for the sake of setting everything straight. This was the democratic left that had spoken out against communism, with clear arguments and free of blind hate; that had proved the most reliable bulwark against threats to the Federal Republic from the radical right; that despite internal dissension had shown itself stalwartly patriotic in defending the Constitution.

Germany has never suffered from a lack of cleaning men, but seldom has a clean-up been carried out so professionally. Those who initiated it, and are keeping it going, were primarily former communists and repentant Maoists. Adopting the style and methods of the Jacobins, they are already busy reintroducing load-bearing lampposts, as well as a relic from medieval times, the whipping-post. And because they have mastered the art of inducing public self-incrimination like no others, the German denunciation business will have plenty to do for the foreseeable future. God or whoever preserve us from the zeal of these converts!

Since this purge began, enlivening the editorial pages and providing some excitement at panel discussions, the democratic left can be found in only two forms: as a ghost one can conjure up, or as a few lone fossils. One of these fossils is speaking to you now. This is what I see when I look around me: the left has been ground down; the Third Way has been closed off. The last defenders of the Constitution will soon be on display at the zoo as an endangered species. The question must be asked: is there any political force currently in a position to fill this intentionally created gap and offer resistance to right-wing terror?

We cannot expect much of the middle-class moderates. They are vulnerable to the handwriting on the wall invoked by the likes of Stoiber, when he points to the "threat of the racial dilution of the German people." to the moderates, any such thing is a fate worse than death, and they find themselves sympathizing with the right-wing terror, though it makes them uncomfortable: "What will people say abroad? It will scare off investors!" Streibl's allusions to a "multicriminal society" and Minister of Finance Theodor Waigel's certainty that "future elections can only be won to the right of center" have not fallen on deaf ears.

On October 3, the Day of German Unity, right-wing radical hordes stormed through the streets of Dresden shouting the old Nazi cry, "*Juda verrecke*" ("Death to all Jews!"). The local police and reinforcements summoned from West Germany provided a protective escort. Meanwhile, in Schwerin any protesters who turned out to demonstrate against the unity chancellor, who was celebrating his great role in history in the Schwerin Theater, were prudently removed from the scene. In Munich, where not long ago a few dozen leftist penny whistles evoked a massive police response, one can clearly perceive, even without referring to the precedent of the Weimar Republic, the right-leaning weakness of the enlarged Federal Republic.

Once again we seem to have gone overboard. The proposition I jotted down last August in Denmark in the form of a question could now be confirmed by further excesses over which the legislative branch of government has no control. Let me mention, as an all-too-compliant supplier of material to *Der Spiegel*, the agency set up to sift through the STASI's files* looking for informers. Ironically, the STASI's hard work is finally paying off; the slow-acting poison is taking effect. The civilized principle that used to obtain—"innocent until proven guilty"—has been reversed: now mere suspicion is considered evidence of guilt.

As a further example of going overboard let me mention the centralized nightmare known as the *Treuhandanstalt*, the agency charged with privatizing holdings in the former GDR. This agency has well-nigh unlimited power to decide people's fates. Nothing compelled us to create these monsters. Now they have taken on a life of their own. Whatever possessed us to behave so mercilessly toward battered, humiliated human beings? Did we West Germans secretly hope to prove ourselves at the "Ossis' " expense? Were they supposed to do penance for our permitting ourselves Chancel-

* The East German secret police.

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lor Kurt Georg Kiesinger and thousands of lawyers and judges with Nazi credentials? Were they, our often invoked "poor brothers and sisters," supposed to indemnify us for the things that went wrong under the sun of the economic miracle? Apropos going overboard: how can one begin to measure the self-righteousness that finds expression in these actions?

I said this at the beginning: during the summer, which was harsh and obstinately dry, the wild geese had halted their flights to our island. There were no distractions. I could not keep my writing paper from filling up with the accumulated bitterness of two years of unity. That is why my Danish notes now impel me to speak of myself, of Germany and myself. Of how I did not want to let go of this country. Of how I somehow mislaid this country. Of what I lack, and what I miss. Also of the things I am happy to be rid of. That is why I have titled my address "On Loss."

The list is long; let me confine myself to a few telling examples. It began with the loss of my homeland. As painful as this loss remained, I could understand and accept the reasons for it. German guilt for wartime atrocities, for the genocide perpetrated on Jews and gypsies, for the murder of millions of prisoners of war and forced laborers, for the crime of euthanasia, and for the suffering we inflicted as occupying power on our neighbors, especially the Polish people—all this led to the loss of my homeland.

Compared to millions of refugees who had a difficult time coming to feel at home in the West, I was well off. With the help of language I managed, not to overcome the loss, but at least, by piecing words together like patchwork, to shape something from which the loss could be read.

Most of my books invoke the vanished city of Danzig, with its nearby hills and flatlands, with the dull pounding of the Baltic. As the years went by, Gdánsk, too, became a topic that wanted to be written about. Loss made me eloquent. Only when you lose something entirely are you inspired with this passion for endless naming, this mania for calling the lost object by name until it finally answers. Loss as the prerequisite for literature. I am almost tempted to concoct a theory based on this experience.

In addition, the loss of my homeland has freed me up for other sorts of commitments. Having a real homeland carries a certain compulsion to stay put. That no longer applies. An almost frivolous pleasure in moving around indulges curiosity about the unfamiliar. A person without a homeland has wider horizons that people who inhabit small or even large inherited plots. Since no ideology artificially inflated the value of my loss—for nothing primally German was lost; nothing primally Polish was regained—I did not need the crutch of nationalism to understand myself as a German.

Different values became important to me. Losing them is more difficult to accept, because they do leave a gap that cannot be filled. I was accustomed to stirring up controversy with my written and spoken words. But during the last three years, that is, as long as I was criticizing German unification, misconceived from the outset, and making a litany of my warnings against the slam-bang process, I eventually had to recognize that I was speaking and writing into a void. My patriotism, which owes its allegiance not to the state but to the Constitution, was not welcome.

I was not alone. I would guess that the same loss has been experienced by Jürgen Habermas and Walter Jens, Christoph Hein and Friedrich Schorlemmer, as well as by all those who, with Wolfgang Ullmann and the "Alliance for a Democratically Structured Federation of German Countries," tried in vain to carry out the obligation expressed in the last article of the Basic Law. This article 146, since deleted, directed that in case of unification the German people should be given a new Constitution to vote on.

The movement for that is past. Leading journalists supported the hasty annexation and dismissed article 146 as meaningless. They share the responsibility for the national catastrophe that unification has become. Yet to this

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day they refuse to admit that their misleading signals and the avoidance of a timely debate over the Constitution were mistakes that carry grave consequences.

Somewhere in secret a constitutional commission is in session. At the same time there is no lack of effort to place further restrictions on the already battered Basic Law.

Granted: speaking without an echo is new to me, and in the long run not very stimulating. Was the situation ever different? Certainly! There were a few years there, when Willy Brandt was chancellor, trying to make a reality of his first official exhortation, "Take a chance on more democracy!" Brandt and his wife, Rut, felt comfortable engaging in free-wheeling discussion with intellectuals. The bold concept of "political culture," now reduced to a mere rhetorical flourish, was actually lived for a while. That is to say, we listened to one another, a virtue that could be learned from Willy Brandt.

When Siegfried Lenz and I accompanied the chancellor to Warsaw in December 1970, we did not feel as though we had merely gone along for the ride. No, precisely because Lenz and I had both accepted the loss of our homeland, our presence implied recognition of Poland's western border. Proud of Germany? Yes, in retrospect I am proud of having been in Warsaw with Brandt.

By the way, it was not only Brandt and his inner circle who contributed to this form of political culture. There was Gustav Heinemann, too. Right after his election as federal president a journalist tried to trip him up with the question, "Do you love the state?" Heinemann responded with exemplary brevity, "I don't love the state, I love my wife." He, too, enjoyed the company of intellectuals, even for a game of cards.

When I try to conjure up this period, so brief, yet of such lasting significance, I am speaking of something lost. Something that could have continued, but remained a one-time phenomenon. Willy Brandt's death made me feel this loss more acutely.

And other losses: Whatever became of the diversity of public opinion? What a rustling of leaves we had in the German journalistic forest when *Der Spiegel* was still true to its original promise, offering a clear alternative to the Springer press. Then there was the radical liberalism of the Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit,* which set it so clearly apart from the stodgy conservatism of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, even though their business sections took much the same tack. Now the editors of the cultural pages of these papers are interchangeable; they contradict each other only in coy asides. It has become fashionable to assume an air of superiority toward the democratic left. (There are exceptions to this unified editorial policy, of course. From the ashes of the once straitjacketed GDR press a few journals have managed to emerge in new forms. But then who in the West reads the eastern *Wochenpost?*) With public opinion already at risk from the galloping formation of press conglomerates, this trend to political conformity could be the death blow. That would mean a loss no democracy can survive.

To speak of these matters in Munich and not mention the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* would be impolite. Granted: it is still holding its own, at least for now. But although it is far more than a regional paper, it is certainly much better known in Bavaria than in Brandenburg.

Perhaps this last example makes it clear how estranged the Germans are from each other. They acknowledge each other's existence only reluctantly. With the differences between east and west hardening, Mecklenburgers and Saxons over there feel farther than ever from Rhinelanders and Swabians over here. Even North and South Germans remain strangers to each other, separated by the Main.

These distinctions result from our history, which promoted separatism and only rarely, and for the most part reluctantly, furthered unity. But perhaps our fear of strangers is the price we pay for the cultural multiplicity of the country, which often becomes apparent at state and athletic events.

Our federalist structure is appropriate. It guarantees not only the more disturbing but also the more stimulating differences, and safeguards, with the zeal of a cottage gardener

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maintaining his fences, our cultural riches, which can always count on those government subsidies that support everything from amateur theaters to archaeological sites.

Our Basic Law wants it this way. Yet federalism, a clever insurance the Germans took out against themselves, has suffered damage in the recent unification process. Not that the sovereignty of the individual provinces has been abrogated; no, the old German separatism, the accumulated self-centeredness of the provinces, their stubborn stewing in their own juice, their selfish scrabbling for subsidies and reparations, has robbed German federalism of that capacity to impose political structure that the federal government and the opposition have failed to manifest during the process of unification. But when federalism as a corrective fails, another loss must be added to the previous list.

I do not hesitate to call the Bundestag's decision to move the capital from Bonn to Berlin a farce. The president of the Bundestag has had to play the role of producer. The vote was taken, then essentially scuttled by business-as-usual in Bonn. The media are in on the act. The expensive set for future debates and window appearances has been dedicated. While everything continues in the same old groove, east of the Elbe the baby has fallen into the well and is screaming.

It's its own fault it fell in. Why all this blubbering? What do they want now? After a while you just stop listening.

Only Regine Hildebrandt, minister for social welfare of the state of Brandenburg, has enough voice left to get people to listen to the baby occasionally. She calls the continuing injustice by name. Whenever this woman makes an appearance, sparks fly from the television screen. She rejects the prevailing genteel tone. Her directness is refreshing; no one could accuse her of being slick. Who, if not Regine Hildebrandt, would be the ideal successor to President Richard von Weizsäcker!

But could we put up with this woman? Would her abrasive charm be compatible with our aesthetic of polish? Would we be brave enough to tolerate Regine Hildebrandt, the glowing passion of her demands, which would fuse the newly splintered country together again?

Or have we Germans become so estranged from one another that we can no longer see past our established property rights? And—the question has a certain urgency—is the inveterate foreignness that exists between Germans the source of the present hostility toward foreigners (whom we call "outlanders") that is covering our country with shame?

Rostock on the radio: the German Broadcasting System. On the Danish island I found an outlet for my rage; later I tried to transfer it with a cold needle to copper plates: punctuation as a last resort.

But even when the rage ebbed, it left sorrow and anger behind. Notes took the form of questions: what have you done to my country? What made this mess they call unity possible? What beer-induced enthusiasm persuaded the voting public to entrust this difficult task, which called for extraordinary political deftness, to a tax-cheat and a man who cooked the

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books? How were critical economic decisions left to that sinister trio, Bange-, Hauss-, and Möllemann?* What producer came up with the brilliant idea of smuggling the topic of dissension-ridden Germany into the bla-bla of the evening talk shows? What stupidity caused us to miscalculate what it meant to take in sixteen million Germans, so that we ended up saddling these people, who had already suffered the injustice of "real socialism," with capitalism's own brand of injustice? Why can't we Germans act humanely, if not toward foreigners at least toward our own people? What are we lacking?

Perhaps we are lacking those we fear—fear because they are strangers to us and look strange. We are suffering from too little exposure to those whom fear makes us hate. And perhaps we lack most acutely those found farthest down on the scale of contempt: the Roma and the Sinti, commonly known as gypsies. No one takes their side. No deputy in the European parliament or in the Bundestag consistently represents their cause, calls attention to their desperate situation. There is no state to which they might appeal and which would be willing to support and embrace, as a matter of national policy, their claim, justified since Auschwitz, for what is pathetically termed reparations.

The Roma and the Sinti are the quintessential victims. "Deport them!" Says Interior Minister Seiters, and gets Romania to cooperate. "Smoke them out!" bawl the skinheads, and provide Herr Seiters with a specific pretext for his deportation policy. But in Romania, too, and elsewhere the gypsies are the quintessential victims. Why should this be?

Because they are different, or worse still: different from different. Because they steal, and roam from one place to another, and have the evil eye, and also have that disturbing beauty that makes us look ugly. Because their very existence calls our value system into question. They are acknowledged to be useful for operas and operettas, but also seen—even if it sounds bad and reminds us of something bad—as asocial, degenerate, worthless. "Torch them!" the skinheads bawl.

Seven years ago Heinrich Böll was laid to rest. The coffin and the honorary pallbearers—Böll's sons, Lev Kopelev, Günter Wallraff, and I—were led by a gypsy band to the gravesite. That was what Böll had requested. For his final music he wanted these profoundly mournful, then suddenly desperately merry tunes. Not until today do I fully understand Böll's unspoken message.

Let them come and stay, if they wish. Let half a million and more Roma and Sinti be among us Germans; we need them desperately.

Look at little Portugal, where, in spite of all the refugees from the former colonies, thousands of gypsies have found a place, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

You hard-bitten Germans, let your hearts be touched at last, and give the skinheads an answer dictated not by fear but by courage, a humane answer.

Stop pushing the gypsies out onto that old, well-trodden path.

They can help us, by providing an irritant to our rigid order. It would not hurt to have some aspects of their way of life rub off on us. They would be a gain, after so much loss. They could teach us how meaningless borders are; the Roma and Sinto do not recognize borders. The gypsies are at home everywhere in Europe. They truly are what we claim to be: born Europeans!

Translated from the German by
KRISHNA WINSTON □

* Martin Bangemann, Helmut Haussmann, and Jürgen Möllemann successively resigned as minister of economics because of scandals.—Tr.

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Kanan Makiya

WHO AM I?

Dilemmas of an Arab Intellectual

The following is an excerpt from Kanan Makiya's forthcoming book, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World*, which we reprint with the permission of W.W. Norton & Co. The book is a remarkable examination by a dissident Iraqi intellectual of the Gulf War and the debates surrounding it, both in the West and in the Arab world. Makiya, using the pen name of Samir al-Khalil, is best known as the author of *Republic of Fear*, perhaps the most important study of the fate of Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th party. This chapter opens the second part of Makiya's book. In previous chapters he explores, among other things, the impact of the events of 1990–91 on the lives of several Iraqis—Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'ites—and Kuwaitis (their names will be found scattered throughout the selection, for example, Taimour, Abu Haydar, Omar, Mustafa, Khalil).—EDS.

Were you [Samir al-Khalil] thinking of visiting your original country, Iraq, carrying your American passport after your American army had installed itself there? You have no right to speak of Iraq and of those who live in it. Iraq and its people are as innocent of you as the wolf is innocent of the blood of Yousuf. You sit in the lap of luxury and in your hand is paper and pencil. This is all that you own. As for feeling and compassion [for Iraq], of that you have none. You should have denounced the attack which sent Iraq back into the twelfth century. Instead, you asked the barbarians to finish what they had started.

Now I don't want to get personal about any of this, but I urge you to look back into yourself and to direct yourself to God, the all-knowing and all-powerful, especially in these holy days [Ramadhan], asking him for forgiveness for your sins. He is all-forgiving and merciful.

—Commentary in *al-'Arab* newspaper

What is the connection between the passport one holds, the views one expresses, the books one writes, and one's innermost emotional and belief system, which is of course what constitutes one's identity? It so happens I don't have an American passport. Nor have I ever had one. However, after years of working hard at it, I succeeded in freeing myself from the restrictions imposed by that great bane of fourteen years of my adult life, that ball and chain upon my freedom: my Iraqi passport. The day I received the letter granting me British nationality in 1982 was one of the happiest in my life. Although I was fortunate enough to know what freedom was in many ways, on that particular day I tasted it. Now I could travel without restrictions, whether those imposed by the Iraqi state even while I resided abroad, or those imposed by harsh immigration policies and the occasional racist officer at a Western port of entry. Never again would I have to go to an Iraqi embassy, posting friends at the corner of the street to check up on whether or not I came out again. Many Iraqis, Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese in forced or voluntary conditions of diaspora and exile will identify with these feelings and with this personal experience.

But there is an unwritten rule among us Arabs that one is not supposed to speak or

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write about such things, as I am doing now. There is shame attached to changing one's passport; it is perceived to be an act of betrayal of some kind. This is what the author of the passage quoted above meant when he rubbed in the words, "*your* American passport . . . *your* American army." The same notions of betrayal, it so happens, found their way into the Iraqi legal system long ago. This system explicitly associates nationality with private belief. The law that reformed the legal system in 1977 takes great care to exclude from citizenship "all persons who take a political, economical or intellectual attitude hostile to the revolution and its Programme." Nor is this an aberration. The law was a distillation of everything the Ba'th had been saying about Arab identity since the 1940s, in Syria, Iraq, and everywhere else the party had a presence. The fact is, I am a traitor, not a citizen, in the eyes of the Republic of Iraq. A bona fide citizen is one who thinks in a certain way, and deviancy is manifest in "bad thoughts" before it is realized in treacherous behavior. The state will not renew my Iraqi passport, and it has other laws which legitimate violence against my person, because of the demonstrable fact—proven by my books—that I think non-Ba'thi thoughts.

In this context, the feelings of shame about changing one's passport are rooted, whether consciously or unconsciously, in similar notions of identity. As these notions enter into open conflict with the exigencies of work, political exile, and even lifestyle preferences, a big lie has to be maintained in the shape of a denial that the change means anything. Many Arabs *enjoy* the very benefits that they will then deny they wanted so desperately as they sought to obtain American or British or French passports. The outcome of such self-deception is that quote from the writer in an Arabic newspaper published out of London who blames me for holding a passport that I don't hold, and who says, in a final ironical twist, that he used to be a great admirer of *Republic of Fear*, until its author was "unmasked" by the political positions he took during the Gulf War.

Who Is an Arab Intellectual?

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the paradigm that had ruled this characteristic Arab discourse on identity was subjected to a most terrible test. Arab nationalist sentiments rooted in the memory of deep historical injustices—the carving up of the Arab world after World War I and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948—came face to face with the ugliness of the regime spearheading Arabism in 1990: Ba'thi Iraq. The whole Arab world was stunned by what Saddam had done. Yet for the first few days after the invasion, a reader restricted to Arabic newspapers would not even have known that Kuwait had been invaded, because the Arabic language press was either engaging in self-censorship or waiting to be told by its financiers what was permissible to write. You had to find out what was going on from the Western media.

Not that this made much of a difference to the vast majority of those who think of themselves as Arab or "pro-Arab" intellectuals. With the exception of the Gulf states and Egypt—which has been living an isolated intellectual life since the Camp David Accords—I am aware of no community of Arab intellectuals, however small, that could make a meaningful political distinction between the interests of the suffering people of Iraq, who had just lost a whole generation in eight years of grueling warfare with Iran, and the tyrant, who was sacrificing them on the altar of yet another adventure. At the same time it became difficult for some Arabs—those most directly affected, overwhelmingly Kuwaitis and Iraqis—to avoid reacting to this latest Middle East crisis on the grounds of what was being done to Kuwait under occupation, and what had been going on inside Iraq during the previous twenty years. A new, self-critical sensibility has begun to enter Arab politics. But like any new thing born into an environment hostile to the idea of self-criticism, it is very, very fragile.

Old habits die hard. They die hardest of all among people who have made it their duty to awaken pride in self and a sense of collective identity by blaming all ills on some "other"—a foreign agency or "alien" culture outside the

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community one is trying to extol, and often more powerful and dynamic. The painful thing to observe is the unrelenting stridency of the Arab intelligentsia's attempt to blame every ill on the West or Israel. The language gets more unreal, hysterical, and self-flagellating, the less the Arab world is actually able to achieve politically and culturally in modern times.

Consider this all-too-common incident. Ahmad, an upper-middle-class, well-educated young man, was born and brought up in Baghdad. He despises politics, like most educated Iraqis of his generation brought up in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. All his friends in the United States, where he recently came to study, were Arabs. Several months after the debacle of the Gulf War, in the course of an evening of partying and fun, Ahmad had a conversation with Mazin, a similarly well-educated Jordanian studying business administration in Chicago. Mazin referred to Saddam as the only "real man" in the Arab world for standing up to the West. Ahmad wanted to know what standing up had accomplished. "Nothing, but he proved to the West that we Arabs are nations to be reckoned with." Nor would Mazin admit that the invasion of Kuwait had been a mistake. Ahmad recalls the conversation:

> He started the war too soon, he should have gotten the bomb first.
> *So that instead of hundreds of thousands dead, we would have had a few millions?*
> But then we could have faced Israel.
> *The only way to face Israel is by shaking hands.*
> But that is treason!
> *Treason is killing your own people, dragging them through a bloody long war and then telling them to take Kuwait back.*
> Well, you are a Kurd, you don't like him anyway.

It is as though someone senses deep down that he is a failure in the present, in the world he knows and has been brought up in, but is goaded into desperate self-assertion, first by the constant reminder of how wonderful and glorious his ancestors were; and second, by the image of apparently omnipotent outsiders, who effortlessly sweep him aside in every real or imagined confrontation. These two factors combine into an ideological apology for his own impotence: his people would be glorious, his state would be all-powerful, but for the machinations of the imperialists (or the Great Satan, which amounts to the same thing). What has now happened is that this person's very identity has become constructed in a totally negative way: he is who he is because of who he hates, not because of who he loves or is in solidarity with.

Another way of constructing one's identity, by looking inward self-critically, rather than outward, has not been explored by the Arab intelligentsia as a way of facing up to the crisis of their world after 1967—a world that has been lurching headlong from one catastrophe to another for longer than any of us care to contemplate. A very large number of people have invested much of their lives in constructing and defending this "rejectionist" paradigm, which has now become second nature to a new generation of Arabs like Mazin. Paradoxically, therefore, the greatest threat facing the new self-critical sensibility comes from the very people who ought to be nurturing it: that community of Arab and self-proclaimed "pro-Arab" intellectuals.

What is a "pro-Arab" intellectual? Why is it that we do not hear about "pro-French" or "pro-Latin-American" intellectuals? Because they don't exist. Borges and Márquez think of themselves as writers who come from Argentina and Colombia. One reads them or not largely because of what or how they write, not because of where they come from or the views they hold. Then there are specialists in the work of such writers, who are interested in looking for connections and common preoccupations, but who would never imagine themselves as "pro" or "anti" Latin America. This is not the case with writers from or about the Middle East, who too often project themselves and their work as "Arab," "Palestinian," or "pro-Arab" in the politically charged connotations of those labels. As an old Palestinian friend of mine, who is constantly having to shuttle between conferences, once put it: "I have turned into a professional Palestinian." He was aware of the problem; most Arab and

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"pro-Arab" writers aren't. The funny thing is that "being a Palestinian" or being a "pro" or even an "anti" Arab spokesperson is an effective strategy for drawing attention to oneself or to one's cause, and it is most effective in the United States.

The very existence of such labels is a sign of how degraded the intellectual climate of debate about the Middle East has become both in the Arab world and in the West. Think of the poisoned atmosphere inside some Middle East Studies departments in universities, especially in the United States, where the Arab-Israeli conflict all too often gets replayed in the pettiest of forms. Semi-professional clubs and informal networks of "pro-Arab" and "pro-Israel" cliques have sprung up even—or especially—in academic life, each of which worships at a particular shrine and has its childish taboos. These islands of boredom in their intellectual predictability create stereotypes far more effectively than the Western media, which at worst simply reiterate them.

Who is an Arab intellectual? This is harder to pin down than one would think because there are no longer any coherent criteria that combine the qualities of being an Arab (and not, say, an Egyptian) with an interacting intellectual community such as one finds in a country like Egypt. "Arab intellectuals, or intellectuals from among the Arabs?" asks Isma'il al-Amin, from the Arab daily *al-'Arab*, which supported the Iraqi regime through the Gulf crisis. It is a good question, which he answers very poorly: "How can a writer be an Arab intellectual, a carrier of Arabic culture as long as he footnotes his article, study or book with references that have not the remotest connection to Arabic, neither in language nor in culture nor in thought?"

Behind such a question lies the bigoted assumption, widespread among far more intelligent and westernized Arabs than al-Amin, that there is a hermetically sealed, *uniquely Arab nexus* between how one thinks and who one is, the same nexus that we encountered at the beginning of this chapter. I am not who I think I am; I am *how* I think. Amin believes that even Arabs who write in Arabic may no longer "be" Arabs, because they do not rely solely on Arab sources. His emphasis is not even the classical nationalist one on language as the criterion of identity; it is on "being" an Arab because one behaves or thinks like one, whatever that is supposed to mean.

An Egyptian publishing in Arabic in Egypt is not a "good" Arab intellectual, or the right kind of intellectual, if he sees himself as an Egyptian and if he fits into a circle of publishers, commentators, and readers who are restricted to Egypt. Even his Arabness is suspect if he didn't take the right position during the Gulf War or when Sadat visited Jerusalem. On the other hand, there is no doubt about the Arabness of a professor of Palestinian origin, who teaches in an American university, and who expresses his rejection of the United States in eloquent English, because he "thinks" like an Arab, and because his "cause" is the cause of all Arabs. What if an individual fits in somewhere between these two extremes, as do that motley collection of exiles from all over the Fertile Crescent who live in Paris and London, and write in Arabic for dailies, magazines, and journals appearing simultaneously in the kiosks of capital cities all over the world?

Arabs everywhere have gotten themselves tangled up in knots over these kinds of issues. Iraqis, even those who wish me well, sometimes ask: "Who do you write for?" They want to know whether I write to please a Western audience or whether I write as an Iraqi, "on behalf of the people of Iraq." Many got upset when I visited northern Iraq to document the *Anfal* operations, which took the lives of at least 100,000 noncombatant Kurds. "Aren't you a Shi'ite?" was the implicit question. "Why don't you write about us?" The assumption once again is that one is who one writes for and that one writes only for who one is. A less sophisticated acquaintance of mine, an Iraqi businessman, was actually convinced that I played up the story of what was done to Iraqi Jews in 1969 in *Republic of Fear* only in order to sell more copies of the book. He approved of this marketing tactic on my part because of how much he hated Saddam Hussein. Anything I did that would benefit "our cause" was fine with him. His is a more sympathetic way of expressing basically the same way of thinking as those non-Iraqi

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Arab-Americans who thought of Samir al-Khalil during 1991 as a "self-hating Arab" who wrote critically about the Arab world in order to curry favor with publishers and book reviewers in the West.

In a similar vein, Edward Said has criticized my writing for being "unsympathetic" to Arabs and advancing the thesis that the violence in the Middle East is inscribed in Arab genes. In the same interview on intellectuals and the Gulf war, Said spoke approvingly of a popular source of conspiratorialism in the Arab world, namely, asking of every piece of writing: "who is this person really speaking *for*. As they say in Arabic, *min warrah?*, 'who's behind him?' " The fundamental difference between myself and Said can be boiled down to the fact that whereas I reject the very asking of such questions of any human being, he approves of them.

"I write for myself, like everyone else," is the confusing answer I give to all these critics. So, if Samir al-Khalil happens to prefer to write in English, and if he has lived largely in the West for the last twenty years, and if he called upon the Allied forces to take out the tyrant in the conviction that this was in the best interests of all Iraqis, was he acting as a bona fide Arab given the added complication that the overwhelming majority of Iraqis thought and felt the same way? The irony is that while Said and Arabic newspapers like *al-'Arab* were horrified by the idea of more Allied intervention, even Ba'thist bureaucrats thought the Gulf war was left unfinished:

> A group of officials whom I had known as meek and loyal servants of the government were standing around in a circle. "General Schwartzkopf didn't go far enough," said one in a loud voice. "He should have come to Baghdad and finished the job." The others nodded. They didn't seem to care any longer whether anyone heard them. [John Simpson, *From the House of War*].

Always there is an uneasy tension between a clearly inner impulse at work in the act of writing and the morality of the final result. When I interviewed the Kurdish boy Taimour,* he did not want to talk to me. He had been taught to spew out a canned speech. But I had not come for this. Thinking of myself as a writer, I wanted much more out of him. So, I sat the boy down for two hours and in effect forced him to relive in infinitesimal detail every moment of his trauma. What right had I to do such a thing? Is Taimour better off for it? He has since become a prime target for assassination. Iraqi patriots and Kurds who hate Saddam Hussein approve of what I did, seeing in it the necessary subordination of an individual's welfare to the general welfare of all Iraqis. An Arab or Palestinian nationalist, on the other hand, might think that exposing the genocidal campaign of 1988 against the Kurds will be turned by Israel or the West into an attack on all Arabs, and that is bad for the Arabs. Right from the start one's motivations are under suspicion.

I despise both these ways of posing the real human dilemmas involved. The morality of what I did to Taimour is subject to all kinds of important questions, the most interesting of which have nothing to do with who I write for, or even who I am. The real and only valid moral questions arise because I write for myself and for no one else. Life would be simpler if I could just turn around and say, "I write on behalf of the Iraqi people, or in order to expose the crimes of Saddam." The fact is, I don't.

The ruling nationalist paradigm of the Arab intelligentsia, severely tested by Saddam Hussein's action on August 2, 1990, cannot be understood apart from the gigantic obsession over who is or is not an Arab. Thus far I have illustrated that paradigm using articles from a typical Arabic daily, *al-'Arab*, not known for the quality of its journalism. But the same obsession is present in one form or another in all the anti-Western rhetoric that comes out of the Arab world. To many Arabs like Mazin, Saddam Hussein looked like a savior, riding in as though from a heroic past in order to uphold "Arab honor" and salve old wounds of frustration and impotence.

However, criticizing the rhetoric of Arab

* Taimour and his family were victims of the 1988 mass murder campaign waged by the Ba'thi regime against Iraqi Kurds. At least a hundred thousand people perished, including all members of Taimour's family. The twelve-year-old boy survived by a miracle.

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politics, it must be stressed, is not the same as abandoning those who are smarting under the lash of Syrian repression or on the receiving end of constant humiliation and a brutal occupation in the West Bank. I will never forget the experience of sitting in a Palestinian taxi driving from Birzeit to Jerusalem, tailing a jeepload of jeering Israeli soldiers gesticulating rudely at the six stony-faced Arabs in the taxi. Nor can I forget a scene just outside Jerusalem's Bab al-Khalil, Jaffa Gate, when two Israeli policemen astride jittery horses searched a terrified Arab boy, who cannot have been more than eight or nine years old, by making him turn his school satchel upside down and spill all the contents onto the grass verge. (I witnessed these scenes in October 1990 during a visit to Jerusalem and the West Bank, a visit made possible because I am now a British passport holder.) In that little boy's position, I thought, as I scoured the dirt for my eraser, pencil sharpener, and scattered papers after the soldiers had gone, I too would look upon Saddam Hussein as a savior. Despair and disenfranchisement, when married to constant abuse and humiliation of this sort, will always generate illusory hopes and superstitious beliefs in any people. Nothing I say in this book should be construed as a critique of Arabs whose dignity and very identity as human beings is being assaulted daily by Israeli policies on the West Bank.

The Language of Cruelty

In this section I will be focusing in particular on the views of those cosmopolitan, westernized Arab and "pro" Arab intellectuals who, more often than not, reside in the West, or who are in a position to write and say what they want. Such people, by virtue of the freedoms they enjoy, are in a position to do something positive for Arabs trapped inside the oppressive countries of the Middle East. Yet in their vast majority they chose, directly or indirectly, either to excuse or to actively go along with the Iraqi dictator's political project. This choice was no momentary lapse; it was a confirmation of the obsessive and deeply unhealthy hold that identity politics has upon Arab intellectuals.

These intellectuals are a very diverse group, sophisticated, and by and large politically aware. My only criterion for including someone in the pantheon of people presented here is that he or she is very accomplished by generally accepted international standards (whether as a scholar, a professional, a poet, or artist of one kind or another). Accepting with Walid Khalidi that in spite of everything, "the Arab world still paradoxically constitutes a single area of psychological, emotional and intellectual resonance transcending state frontiers," my sole criterion for including someone is that he or she writes from a position of deep empathy with, and sense of belonging to, that world—howsoever defined. Throughout, I am not trying to pillory any individual; I am arguing that a certain way of looking at the world, often entered into with the best of intentions, is *morally bankrupt*, and the principal source of our inability to come to terms with problems that are of our own making. If I write for myself, as I said earlier, I also write from the standpoint of a person who wishes from the bottom of his heart to see this tragic state of affairs reversed.

Consider, for instance, Hisham Djaïet, graduate of the Sorbonne, a knight of France's Legion of Honor and probably Tunisia's best-known intellectual. He is an expert in Islamic history who is also a former critic of Ba'thi practices. But in an interview with *L'Express*, he said that Saddam had "the edge" over the Arab states, which were part of the coalition ranged against him because his newfound Islamic vocabulary "corresponds to a reappropriation of self, to the restoration of a deep identity." The passage from heroicizing to mythologizing to celebrating violence is effortless for Djaïet:

> *L'Express:* Since August 11, 1990, you have presided in Tunisia over the national committee of solidarity that is providing support for Iraq and its leader. Why?
> *Djaïet:* Iraq and Saddam Hussein bring hope to the Arab world. For twenty years, the Arab world has been stuck in a frigid, depressing, virtually rotten order: a Saudi-American order whose vision does not go beyond petrodollars. Henceforth a

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new perspective is opening up, that of unification. And Iraq is its pole and motor.

L'Express: How do you justify the annexation of Kuwait?

Dajïet: I don't have to tell you, as Europeans, that your nations were born out of wars. In annexing Kuwait, Saddam Hussein has entered into the dynamics of history. He was trying to make sure of a source of wealth for himself, material means. In addition, he was undertaking the beginning of the unification of the Arab world. Sometimes legitimacy is more important than legality.

L'Express: Even if that were to lead to a generalized conflict?

Djaïet: War has the merit of clarifying things—with respect to your contradictions and with respect to ours. We have everything to gain from this clarification. We have nothing to lose from this war, even if it ended in defeat. Because thanks to Saddam Hussein it is taking place on the level of realities—oil, military force, etc., and no longer on the level of symbols.

Like Saddam Hussein, Hisham Djaïet is able to convert even the most abject defeat into proof of the indomitable spirit of Arabism. This then produces a definition of what it means to be an Arab, which is itself an affirmation of a prior mythologized assertion of "deep identity." Old myths feed into fresh "theorizing," which rests on matter-of-fact assertions such as this: "Violence creates a new historical positivity that makes one forget old pains and voluntary sacrifices." Djaïet is perfectly happy to see tens of thousands of Arab lives expended in order to repossess historical territory. Is it possible that he has taken to seeing his books as enactments in theory of what Saddam Hussein wanted to achieve in practice? To question the factual foundations of this edifice of mythmaking becomes an act of betrayal, indicative only of self-hatred.

The General Secretariat of the Union of Palestinian Lawyers plunged into the same surreal world when it published an advertisement with Saddam's picture in the Jordanian daily, *al-Dustour*, a full week after the war had ended. It read: "Support and Congratulations on Victory to His Excellency the President, Saddam Hussein, May God Preserve Him." The advertisement went on to extol the "legendary steadfastness" of the Iraqi leader "in the face of the conspiracy of the evil invaders." A Tunisian literary critic, after describing the destruction of a handful of buildings in Tel Aviv caused by the first Iraqi SCUD missile, wrote, "Oh, this noble destruction is beautiful!" On a more sober note, and before the war had come to an end, the head of Jordan's delegation in the current Middle East Peace talks, Kamil Abu Jaber, predicted that the Iraqi leader was heading toward military defeat. "But he will remain a hero for the next 1,000 years. Schoolchildren will sing songs about him and mothers will call their sons Saddam."

Saddam did not remain a hero for long in the eyes of some. "This is a tragedy . . . I have been deceived by this man," said Mu'nis Razzaz, a novelist and newspaper columnist in Jordan who came to this realization rather late considering that his father, Munif Razzaz, was a well-known Jordanian Ba'thi who died in an Iraqi prison on the orders of Saddam Hussein for supporting a nonexistent "conspiracy" in 1979. During the crisis and just before the Gulf War broke out, Mu'nis Razzaz had declared that since Camp David, the Arab world had seen "too much cowardice. . . . A hero always presents two choices: to win or to lose." Saddam's reputation, it seems, rested on his perceived strength; he turned into a big disappointment only after he lost.

Not everyone mouthed the brutish values of Saddam as uncritically as Djaïet or Abu Jaber. Many intellectuals kept their distance from the Iraqi leader. The more common stance was to support his policies in practice while vehemently protesting one's innocence of his thuggishness at every step along the way. "Even though most Arabs didn't support the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein's fearlessness in standing up to our enemies . . . appeals to the new spirit of the Arab world—a spirit that says we'd rather die on our feet than live grovelling on the ground," wrote the editor of *Jordan Times* and host of Jordanian television's most influential public affairs talk show, Rami Khouri. In Syria, many of the country's most enthusiastic supporters of de-

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mocracy and liberalization were also the harshest critics of Syria's participation in the Allied coalition. The Lebanese leftist intellectual Fawwaz Trabulsi, long after the war and the uprising had ended and the full scope of the debacle become clear, proudly announced that he had stood by the Iraqi regime without, however, renouncing his opposition to "the repressive relations" that it maintained with its people. Even the Palestinian human rights activist Jonathan Kuttab, a Christian lawyer from East Jerusalem, spoke of Saddam Hussein as the bearer of a new "liberation theology." Kuttab thinks Saddam is ruthless and never wants to be ruled by him. Nonetheless, the Iraqi ruler embodies "something revolutionary and wonderful that is expressed in the traditional slogan 'Allahu Akbar,' which I understand as the faith in a great God: Greater than sophisticated airplanes . . . and all the might of the twenty-eight states that attacked Iraq."

But none of these reactions can match that of Kamal Abu Deeb, a professor of Arabic literature at Columbia University, who tapped into the emotional wellsprings of this intellectual mind-set. Abu Deeb is on the editorial board of the innovative theoretical journal *Mawaqif*, and he is the translator into Arabic of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, among many other distinguished literary accomplishments. After the war had ended, Abu Deeb published a piece of poetic prose entitled *Sarkhah fi Matah (Screaming in a Wasteland)*:

> We cannot but be with the nation. . . .
> The nation may be a gargantuan tyrant. . . . The nation may be a policeman whose dogs chase us everywhere inside its walls.
> The nation may be the cave of our disillusionment, or the slaughterhouse of our sweet dreams, or the grave of our freedom and honor. . . . And the nation may be a thousand worse and even more terrible things.
> Still, we cannot but be with the nation.

Prison walls are a metaphor for national boundaries. The clear implication is that this prison is Ba'thi Iraq. One is therefore entitled to think the writer has no illusions about the regime of Saddam Hussein. Certainly this is what he wants us to think. But why should any Arab want to be aligned with or inside such a terrible place, especially when he has so few prior illusions about it? From the piece, it does not appear that the thought crossed Abu Deeb's mind. Millions of Iraqis—like Abu Haydar, Omar, and Mustafa—were either rebelling against the tyrant or voting with their feet and running away from his prison at the very moment that *an-Naqid*, a London-based Arabic monthly cultural review, was publishing these lines. Presumably in Abu Deeb's eyes, and in the eyes of the editor of this review, their plight and their reasons for rebelling are subordinate to being at one with "the nation."

Abu Deeb's rhetoric is symptomatic of a fundamental cultural malaise. Whose nation is this that "We cannot but be with"? Abu Deeb is a Syrian; he doesn't live in Iraq. Saddam Hussein, we all recall, was supposedly leading the Arab nation when he occupied Kuwait and when he lobbed SCUD missiles into Israel. Is this the Arab nation that Abu Deeb has in mind? Probably not, because Abu Deeb doesn't like Saddam Hussein. The more plausible explanation is that Abu Deeb's nation is a myth; it is at one and the same time a prison and a fairy tale. Hence Abu Deeb's sense of his own identity is suspended in a void of his own making.

There is a morbid subliminal imperative at work in an article like this. The sentiments it expresses epitomize the anxiety, primal rage, and overt schizophrenia that are the general condition of modern Arab culture today. In the same breast-beating tradition, during the height of the Gulf crisis the Palestinian poet Samih al-Qasim wrote: "Since the earth is not about to split asunder and swallow me up, let me try then to tear myself apart to swallow up the earth."

These are, I submit, false, self-destructive, and ultimately cruel sentiments. They are false because they are so obviously grounded in a lie, a lie that was being proved to be one at the very moment of writing by the actions of the "prisoners" themselves—the people of Iraq—who, unlike Abu Deeb, were obliged to be in or "with the nation." To paraphrase Milan

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Kundera, this kind of intellectual mendacity is about gazing "into the mirror of the beautifying lie," and being moved "to tears of gratification at one's own reflection." The fixation upon the sweet lie, to which all real conflicts between people are subordinated, is the most depressing thing about the Arab intelligentsia's reaction to the Gulf crisis.

Even more important, it is very dangerous. Dangerous because it takes place at the expense of life as it is really lived, and finally at the expense of the real lives of people. It is as if Khalil, Abu Haydar, Omar, Mustafa, Taimour, and all the flesh-and-blood individuals that I quoted earlier in this book do not exist, or have been turned into a theoretical abstraction. That is the source of the cruelty of this language. Like Nizar Qabbani's poetry, Abu Deeb's mythmaking and Samih al-Qasim's self-flagellation operate at a gigantic distance from the actual feelings of Iraqis and Kuwaitis as they experience the world that these men of letters are writing about. There were horrors unfolding all around, and there was a rhetoric about those horrors; the two were separated by an unbridgeable chasm. This is a cruel rhetoric, one that does not take as its point of departure the sufferings of the people who have to live inside the prison walls. On the contrary, it subordinates their pain to the importance of leaving the walls of this combined prison and fairyland guarded and intact.

But the most heartbreaking reaction of all to the Gulf crisis came from people who made a vocation of human rights. Moncef Marzouki, president of the Tunisian Human Rights League, the largest such organization in the Arab world, focuses on the lies and distortions of those "soldiers of psychological war," the Western media, "which we envied and admired." Their talk of the decimation of the Iraqi air force by the Allies is, he says, "today the laughingstock of all." He thinks the Iraqi army put up a brave fight, which the Arab world would be able to use to heighten its awareness of Western limitations. The "determination, the defiance and insolence" of the Iraqi soldier was a classic instance of "the human being confronting the machine."

> [T]he brutal crushing of Iraq . . . will not change a thing. One can dare and challenge technology. If the latter has suddenly ceased to impress, what is to be said about the values?
> In the Gulf war, it is not only Western information and technology which have failed, but above all the credibility of the famous values of the West. The dogma [of human rights], because that is what it is, is sinking all along the southern shores of the Mediterranean. . . . Paradoxically, only insofar as we Arab democrats succeed in uncoupling and disassociating the democratic project and the values of human rights from Western centrism will we be able to salvage something from the rising tide of all "isms."

Marzouki is telling it straight from the heart; he writes as though he is on the verge of packing it all in and giving up on his profession. After taking the usual ritual distance from Saddam Hussein, he proceeds to heap one paragraph of abuse after the other on top of the Kuwaitis whose city had just been sacked and whose oil fields were just about to be set on fire. The "rights" of countries and of peoples were at issue in all of this, no matter which way one looked at the crisis. Do Kuwaitis not have rights just because Marzouki despises them? Clearly something very complicated is going on in the mind of a man who has committed his life to defending civic freedoms, and yet is still unable to react in a way that is consistent with that commitment. "Sometimes legitimacy is more important than legality," Djaïet said. The same chilling sensibility is at work in Marzouki's notion of "Arab democracy." In the course of a demonstration expressing solidarity with the arch tyrant of modern Arab politics, he called on Iraq to make use of its chemical weapons.

Accepting Arab Frailty

These ways of talking, of thinking, of setting political priorities, have ruled the Middle East for a very long time now. After the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, they began sweeping through the entire ideological spectrum. In the Mashriq, Arab liberals became an extinct species; communism withered, bent, and finally broke under the onslaught of nationalism,

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long before the collapse of the Soviet system. Islamic militancy, on the other hand, had no problem with the language in the first place; the idea of a rapacious West descending on the Muslim world is as old as the Crusades. Neither Arab nationalism nor Islamic political activism has yet developed even the most primitive conception of political "rights," whose most elementary underpinning is the absolute isolation of all matters of belief from entitlement and obligation in public life. Wherever one looks, it seems, the principle of "human rights" in politics is on the run in the Arab-Muslim world. That is why the idea of an "American Crusader plan" for the region was so all-pervasive in the rhetoric that accompanied the crisis in the Gulf.

In its latest Gulf crisis incarnation, Arab nationalism creates an even more dangerous conundrum of identity than before—one that is wildly at variance with the actual condition of Arabs, especially the intellectuals among them. That condition is factually one of fragmentation and atomization, regardless of whether one is struggling to survive under siege in Birzeit University, writing for the Arab newspaper conglomerates of London and Paris, preaching from the rostrums of Western universities, or in exile from one of the many regimes that have choked off all civility in the Arab world.

In 1979, the year he fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Iraqi poet Fawzi Kareem wrote:

> Each sail not counted as yours, oh policeman of the border,
> Sailing not in useless search for The Meaning
> But fleeing from all those black meanings,
> Know that it is mine.

A poem like this overturns Djaïet's obsession with Arabness and Abu Deeb's self-flagellating anxiety over who he is, because it rests on the poet's celebration of his difference and his individuality. Kareem has accepted his condition as one of "fragmentedness." He has done so with a degree of grace—why (God forbid!), he has even been able to make something of it. His poem is a humble act of acknowledgement and self-renewal at the same time. In the absence of such acceptance of the multiple, frail, nonideological nature of the human condition, a continuing and increasingly morbid hatred of the West and Israel is going to remain the focus onto which increasingly degraded notions of "Arabness" or "Islamic identity" are pinned. This is what is so deeply and personally frightening about the current predicament of the Arab world. In the end, it doesn't matter what local coloring that hatred takes (anti-imperialism, Arab nationalism, Palestinian nationalism, religious fundamentalism). The important point is that today all these ideologies are being boiled down into pure unadulterated hate.

Half a century ago, Michel 'Aflaq, the founding "Duce" of the Ba'th party, had captured the essence of what Kareem was running away from: "nationalism is love before anything else." 'Aflaq's "Republic of Love" has since been realized in the shape of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Think of Kareem as one of the many Iraqis who have become desperate to escape the suffocating embrace of so much love, and you can see how a new Arab sensibility is born, one whose logic is a repudiation of the old paradigm that welded my identity into *how I think*, not into *who I think I am*.

But it was the Syrian-born poet Adonis, that innovator in the forms of the Arabic language, who first began constructing the scaffolding of new literary forms around which a new quality of Arabness could be built. Adonis is one of the most distinguished writers in the Arabic language today. In his writings of the 1960s, he explored the complex terrain between culture and politics. He has delved into the history of ideas, East and West, and he has plumbed psychological and emotional depths that many Arab intellectuals have avoided. In 1986, he gave up on Beirut to live in Paris, with a sense—as he put it—that "something in the Arab world has died." His voice greatly influenced poets like Kareem. This extract from a 1982 poem, for instance, was written inside war-torn Beirut:

> My era tells me bluntly:
> You do not belong.
> I answer bluntly:
> I do not belong,
> I try to understand you.

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Now I am a shadow
Lost in the forest
Of a skull.

The realization that one has turned into a "shadow" that no longer "belongs" in a world ruled by violence is the beginning of wisdom. The first act of reclamation is to move from the knowledge that something has gone wrong toward a new kind of Arab humility, one that is founded on an acceptance of human frailty.

Throughout the Gulf crisis Adonis chose to remain silent, thereby expressing an anguish that he clearly felt to be in the culture itself at this crucial juncture. He is one of the few who sensed that no one had anything new to say, which troubled him greatly.

However, goaded and taunted by the editor of the cultural page in the Arabic daily *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, on March 11, 1991, he broke his silence in the aftermath of the Gulf War with an article entitled, "The Prayer and the Sword: Or Savage Democracy." The article begins with the assertion that the Gulf crisis and the war it gave birth to have created a new, deteriorating "western rhetoric" about the Arab world. This rhetoric should make us all pause to rethink the nature of the relationship between the Arabs and the West. The example that Adonis singled out to illustrate his point is an article by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. This was a bold attempt to reexamine the much-bandied-about comparison between Saddam Hussein and Hitler. Enzensberger's point was that both men had in common an urge to self-destruction and a complete inability to distinguish between their own individual fatality and that of the collectivity of all Iraqis or all Germans.

Adonis considered this line of thinking from a German writer and a leading leftist democratic intellectual, who played a prominent role in Germany's 1968 student movement, to be "exaggerated to the point of mystification." Saddam Hussein of course is a nasty, unpleasant dictator. But the idea of comparing him to Hitler was going too far. The implicit assumption of Adonis's argument was that "your" Hitler certainly was the incarnation of all evil, but "our" Saddam Hussein is a run-of-the-mill despot. Moreover, Saddam's brutishness was, Adonis asserted, a fact known to all Arabs.

When all things are equally nasty, then nothing is really nasty at all and one is simply unable to make distinctions any longer. Making distinctions, however, is the very stuff of a creative engagement with the world.

I remember a feeling of sadness sweeping over me as I read Adonis's article, for I too had read Enzensberger's commentary. And although I had certain reservations—his view of Iraq was too "German"—my impressions were exactly the opposite of Adonis's. The point of Enzensberger's article, a point Adonis had completely failed to see, was the humbling one of integrating the phenomenon of Saddam Hussein into *his own country*'s experience of political evil. To read Enzensberger and to accept in the core of one's being the reality of Iraq's experience under the Ba'th, was to understand the commonality of the human condition, and to refuse its glib division into East and West, or north and south, or Arab and anti-Arab. Adonis had failed this test. The failure, it became clear, had nothing to do with personal integrity and knowledge of classical texts or modern thought, areas in which Adonis is greatly cultured. He had failed to see what Enzensberger really meant because he was emotionally unprepared to see it. Emotional blocks like this are the greatest obstacle to the emergence of a healthy sense of identity, one that fully embraces the "other."

Many Arabs realize that something has gone terribly wrong. Djaïet speaks of a "frigid, depressing, virtually rotten" Arab order; Abu Deeb writes of prisons; and Adonis, who is in a different league entirely, chose silence. Unfortunately, it is not enough to realize that something is amiss, for the realization may lead to conclusions such as "war has the merit of clarifying things." That frightening banality was still being defended by many Arabs long after some horrible realities ought to have been thoroughly clarified. Djaïet and Abu Deeb's politics of despair is saturated in violence, hatred, and bitterness. These give rise to despairing conclusions like "we have nothing to lose in this war," and they lead to dismissal of even the fig leaf of a shared morality with Kurds or

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Jews or Sunnis or Shi'is. The result is always more Arab and Muslim dead.

The nationalism of too many cosmopolitan "anti-imperialist" Arab intellectuals today speaks only to base sentiments associated with that rising pile of bodies. In the current historical conjuncture—not always or for all time—it is incapable of rising above them because it is so deeply hostile to accepting a notion of individual human rights in politics not based on double standards. This kind of nationalism did not come out of the blue. It is a historically formed amalgam of sentiments and traditions traceable to the historical role of the Arabs in the creation and spread of Islam. Like Islam, Arab nationalism is not going to go away. It is a component part of culture, not an explicit political ideology. It "reflects less a collective will freely consented to than a 'culture of consensus' with theological connotations that condition the collective Arab unconscious."

When Shaikh As'ad al-Tamimi, the leader of the Islamic Jihad movement in Jordan (and a strong supporter of Iran during the Iraq-Iran War), called Saddam Hussein's "return" to Islam "a high point in the Islamic awakening" of the 1980s, he is meeting people like Djaïet, Abu Deeb, Kuttab, and Khouri on the same cultural-historical ground. The fact that westernized cosmopolitans might be embarrassed by the Shaikh's admiration for Khomeini, and his desire to have the caliphate of the eighth century restored under Saddam, is irrelevant. For culture is the terrain on which Shaikh As'ad and nationalist intellectuals met during the 1990–91 Gulf crisis, just as stereotyping is the terrain on which they meet with Nizar Qabbani in spite of the latter's honorable personal position toward Kuwaiti suffering during the crisis. Nationalism has always derived great strength from the existence of such a common ground with Islam, or with a pre-Islamic Arab Bedouin tradition like *hija'*. That is why it has lasted for so long and can renew itself time after time. Culture is also the area in which these sentiments and traditions will have to be interrogated and reshaped in the future in order to become consistent with a less cruel view of the Arab condition—one that is founded on the idea of inviolable individual political rights.

The sentiments underlying cultural nationalism should never be mistaken for Pan-Arabism alone (whether Nasserism, or Ba'thism, or any other kind of Arab nationalism). In fact, the political forms in takes are very malleable. Yesterday, they revolved around Sati'a al-Husri, Michel 'Aflaq, or Jamal 'Abdel-Nasser and the romantic ideal of *umma 'arabiyya wahida*, one Arab nation. In the wake of the Iranian revolution, the same sentiments that created Ba'thism turned into Islamic revivalism and the sudden rediscovery of political Islam by one formerly secular intellectual after another (the Egyptian ex-Marxists Muhammad 'Amara and 'Adil Hussein, for instance). During the Gulf crisis, cultural nationalist feeling revolved around hating the West and taking pride in Saddam's personification of Arab-Muslim strength. Tomorrow, they are likely to turn into rabid hatred of the "wrong kind" of fellow Arab.

This world of attitudes, emotional responses, and cultural images does not need a well-constructed political ideology to make itself felt in speech and intellectual discourse. An "issue" is all that it takes to bring that formless emotional amalgam bursting out into the open. On August 2, 1990, Kuwait became that issue. In less than two weeks, "linkage" fused Kuwait onto the Palestinian question. The most ominous sentence in the Djaïet interview—"legitimacy is more important than legality"—was a sentiment shared by every Arab who couldn't see what all the fuss over Kuwait was about, but could only see the unfolding of yet another grand Western design against the Arab world. □

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Oleg Bogomolov

WHO WILL OWN "NOBODY'S PROPERTY"?

The Perils of Russian Privatization

We asked the distinguished Russian economist Oleg Bogomolov to write about the problems of "privatization." The term is slippery since it is currently used to include everything from selling enterprises to foreign capital to having enterprises turned into cooperatives run by the workers employed in them. Here are his views; we'll try to have others in later issues.—EDS.

At the beginning of Gorbachev's perestroika, a number of economists expressed the idea that so-called "socialist property" essentially belonged to no one—it lacked a subject. But the well-being of those who managed this property in the name of the state directly depended neither on the size of the property under their authority nor on its effective use. Complete or partial property losses due to bad management did not lead to those severe consequences that an entrepreneur experiences in the West. The state simply registered the losses. In a word, the changing of property rights was put forward even at that time as the principal item of an economic reform designed to make interest in profit the moving force of development.

Today it seems that society and its ruling powers firmly associate transition to the market with privatization of state property. For the most part, one cannot prove that market mechanisms are beginning to function and guarantee the progress of the economy simply by virtue of the fact that producers and consumers of goods and services are now free to behave as they please. In other words, market mechanisms will only really function when the state ceases to be a monopoly property owner of land, minerals, forests, enterprises, residential housing, roads, and so on, and when a majority of independent property owners, acting at their own risk and competing among themselves, comes into being.

But just who will become the owner of "nobody's" property, and how? Theoretical arguments on the issue continue, but practice often takes an unexpected and far from optimal turn. That which arose in other countries in the course of lengthy historical development must be reconstructed in postcommunist Russia, as in the other successor states of the USSR, with the aid of social engineering, and in a fairly compressed time period. The process in question is not about the privatization of individual state enterprises located in a sea of private business, as in Great Britain or France, but the transfer of the predominant share of national wealth into various forms of private property: individual, cooperative, corporate stock, and so forth. The task is practically unprecedented. The experiences of Hungary, Poland, and former Czechoslovakia—who are outdistancing Russia in the implementation of privatization—are perhaps worthy of a bit of study, but do not lend themselves to simple reproduction. These countries chose dissimilar models of privatization, and, more important, it has yet to be proven which of them is best.

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What is more, the psychological and social atmosphere of these countries little resembles that of Russia. Therefore, it is up to us to find our own path.

The government of Ryzhkov believed that the purchase of state property by citizens would become the most acceptable method of privatization. This same approach essentially underlay the "500 Days" plan for economic stabilization and market reform. Gorbachev repeatedly spoke out in favor of selling enterprises to worker collectives or leasing them to collectives with the option to buy. Early on, the Gaidar team also preferred the sale of state property, since it considered any free distribution of property to carry the danger that people would not value and multiply such property. "What the wind brings," declared Minister Chubais, "the wind also takes away."

Thereafter the Russian government changed its position and developed a new plan of privatization, taking into account the social mood and the absence of monetary means for purchasing state property. Those comparatively limited savings at the disposal of the population and, likewise, those means available to enterprises (amortized deductions, technical reconstruction funds, and so on) turned out to be almost completely worthless in 1993. One can hardly expect a strong impulse for savings in order to purchase enterprises in the future, given raging inflation and the real negative interest rate paid on savings accounts. In such conditions, the redemption of state property could drag on for decades or fail to take place altogether.

Moral and ethical considerations must also be added to this picture. The idea that the country's riches—with the exception as a rule of the modest belongings that became personal property—belonged to the people was firmly established in social consciousness over the course of decades. This idea was strengthened by the constitution of the Soviet Union. Call it naiveté by virtue of the prevailing idealism, but each citizen believed that some part of the general wealth belonged to him or her. And now it is very difficult to convince those citizens of the necessity to buy their own property. This idea challenges a keenly felt sense of social justice and is forcing the architects of reform to turn to the idea of a partially free distribution of state property.

Specialists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union alike have long recommended free distribution, or free distribution in combination with sale and purchase, as the principal method for privatizing state property. A number of my articles have been dedicated to the economic and social reasons that make this method expedient. The notion of social justice speaks in favor of the idea of a combined distribution—free and paid—of state property. Possessed of enormous riches, the state, it would appear, must compensate the population for the enormous losses due to inflation and the fall of real income. Other arguments are similarly convincing. In order to create a social base for market reforms, the state should facilitate the acquisition of property by broad sectors of the population in the form of apartments, houses, and plots of land, or in the form of shares of enterprise stock and allotments of joint (cooperative) property. Property ownership will awaken in millions of people an interest in increasing the production of goods and services for the market, and accumulating and effectively using property.

In my view, the economy can be revived if people's attitude toward work changes. But in order to guarantee their motivation, effective material stimuli, adequate salaries in a sound currency, and the transformation of numerous *lumpen* into property owners are needed.

The limitation on the population's consumption has reached a critical point beyond which endurance may run out and a popular revolt *(smuta)* will ensue. Fiscal measures alone will not succeed in stabilizing the ruble; in order to make the ruble sound, it is necessary to increase the supply of goods on the market and find ways to quickly widen and encourage entrepreneurial activity. Here the privatization of state property acquires a fundamental meaning. The principal wealth of Russia—its productive and intellectual potential and natural resources—was withdrawn from market circulation, nationalized, and then, instead of being

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subject to purchase or sale, was subject only to administrative redistribution between users. This removal of wealth from monetary circulation limited the supply of goods in the extreme and deprived the ruble of the guarantee so essential to it.

State property (land, forests, minerals, enterprises, housing, and so on)—valued at market prices and in hard currency—could become an anchor securing the stability of the monetary and banking systems if a considerable part of this property becomes the object of trade on the open market. Unfortunately, the government has considered privatization least of all from this point of view. The spontaneous division of property that has begun among state authorities at various levels and among the heirs of state structures that are being liquidated, and the subsequent sale or lease of this property, have not provided for a determination of the real value of this property.

Under current conditions in Russia, only small enterprises can be privatized by sale at genuine market prices. Other means are needed for the privatization of all remaining state property, including free distribution and the sale of property to Russia's citizens as well as foreigners. It seems to me that the most intelligent method of free distribution of property is the distribution of vouchers to the adult population assigning each person a portion of the value of state property. This method, however, has met and will continue to meet with a number of objections, the most important being the surge of inflation caused by the issuance of vouchers.

I believe this danger has been greatly exaggerated. The vouchers can, of course, be considered an additional means of payment entering into circulation, but this means of payment has a particular purpose: the purchase of shares of an enterprise, perhaps, or of land or apartments, that is, that part of state property that can be transformed into a market good. And it is this property that will serve as real security for people. The relation between the population's demand for means of payment and the supply of goods should not, therefore, worsen as a result of the issuance of vouchers if, it stands to reason, the supply of shares, land, and so on does not excessively lag behind. Finally, the vouchers will be subject to destruction after their exchange into shares.

The sale of vouchers for cash should also not be considered an additional inflationary factor, inasmuch as the amount of money in the hands of the population will not increase as a result. Money will simply pass from one hand to another.

The weakness of this form of privatization lies elsewhere. Enterprises that offer their shares in exchange for vouchers receive nothing in return that would allow them to renovate their equipment or make new investments. Only assistance in sound money and hard currency will do that. However, one must not disregard the social effect of an enterprise making an offering of its shares. The personnel, having become partial owners of their enterprises with the aid of vouchers, acquires a stimulus for more productive work and better use of the firm's plant. Not to mention the generally favorable influence this type of privatization will exert on the political climate of the country which, in the end, will help it overcome its economic difficulties. One can only count on this social effect when voucher privatization has been sufficiently well thought out in all of its details and answers on the whole to the population's conception of social justice.

This last proviso is absolutely essential, for in practice reasonable ideas are often transformed into their opposite. Such a threat is fully real in Russia, where transforming enterprises into shareholder corporations and privatization through vouchers is being forced at a fast pace. Small-scale privatization, including small firms in retail trade and the service sector as well as local industrial firms, are selling their shares at market prices at open auction. These firms' shares are redeemed either by worker collectives, which enjoy certain advantages, or with capital pulled together by private entrepreneurs. In 1992, more than 14,000 small enterprises were privatized. Altogether, this accounts for only 11 percent of their total number. It is significantly less than what the government had projected and is proof of buyers' lack of

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confidence in future business as well as of the difficulties of obtaining credits for purchases.

Urban apartments in a number of cities (for example, Moscow and St. Petersburg) and modest garden and dacha lots are passing into the ownership of their users free of charge. Here again, the legalities are vague and there is a great deal of red tape in registering the property rights, but for millions of people this kind of privatization has the most tangible effect. Such privatization does not correct, rather it reinforces the unfair distribution of goods that took place in the past. The future, however, offers the prospect of a new distribution of property according to market, and no longer administrative, laws.

At the moment, the Russian population regards the chances for using vouchers warily. Every citizen of Russia, regardless of age, possesses the right to receive a voucher in the amount of 10,000 rubles. Great uncertainty exists as to which enterprises will put their shares up for sale in exchange for vouchers; very likely only the workers of an enterprise are certain to succeed in becoming its shareholders. Thus, not all people are inclined to wait until they can exchange their vouchers for shares—many prefer to sell vouchers for cash at a price significantly lower than face value. At the end of December 1992, the price of a voucher on a number of exchanges had sunk to 6,000 rubles.

The skeptical attitude toward "voucherization" has serious foundations. First of all, privatization through vouchers applies only to a small part of the national wealth: medium- and large-scale industrial enterprises primarily in the civilian economy, and, even then, not all of these enterprises. This privatization does not encompass military factories. The value of the land and its minerals, the forests, the state housing fund, communal facilities, intellectual potential, and much more has not been considered. The face value of a voucher was determined by dividing the highly artificial book value of the above-mentioned rather small range of enterprises by the total number of the population. The book value was calculated in already out-of-date prices even before the price liberalization and inflation explosion. In current prices at the end of 1992, and even more so in 1993, the face value of the 10,000-ruble voucher can only be seen as a pathetic offering to people who have been robbed. If shares were to be put on the market at an amount corresponding to the book value of enterprises in pre-January 1992 prices and could be obtained at face value in exchange for vouchers, then the value of the vouchers would increase in number by 50 to 100 times. Obviously, only workers who acquire a portion of the property of their own enterprise receive this advantage; the shares remaining after this initial distribution will be sold at market prices having little in common with their face value.

It is foolish to approach privatization without having determined beforehand the real value of the property being privatized—even if only roughly. Under conditions of rapid inflation, this valuation can only be done in hard currency and using international prices. Technically, of course, this task is extremely complicated, but as the trusteeship of the eastern lands of Germany by the Treuhandanstalt agency in Germany demonstrates, not impossible. Obviously, the assistance of Western specialists and consulting and auditing firms is required.

The complexity of such an appraisal and a lack of time are impelling the Russian authorities to start privatization without bothering about the real price for which state property will be put on the market. Given this situation, one can expect that some people will become undeservedly rich, while others will receive almost nothing from the sale of the state's goodies. It is difficult to know what social discontent this process bears within itself, but it is already clear that privatization of this sort is in the hands of the former and new nomenklatura. That is, it is in the hands of those who control information, possess influence, and stand at the levers of management.

According to the laws adopted in Russia, all state enterprises with more than a thousand workers or a book value greater than fifty million rubles as of 1 January 1992 are subject to an obligatory reorganization into shareholder

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companies and the creation of a board of directors made up of managers, workers, and government officials. In other words, these enterprises will remain state property, but must switch over to working under market conditions and competition, covering all their own expenses (including capital investment) from proceeds derived from the sale of products and services and the use of bank credits. This approach to privatization sometimes goes under the name of "commercialization." After this commercialization, privatization in the proper sense ought to begin, as the enterprise will receive the right to choose one of two possible privatization plans.

According to the first plan, a quarter of a company's capital is to be transferred free of charge to its workers in the form of nonvoting shares of stock, with up to 10 percent of the voting shares available for their purchase at a 30 percent discount from the face value. Under favorable conditions, managers will receive 5 percent of the total stock package. The remaining shares are reserved for the state and may be sold to any willing buyer.

According to the second plan, workers and managers together have the right to purchase up to 51 percent of the enterprise's entire capital stock, estimated at its book value as of 1 January 1992, multiplied by a factor of 1.7.

The procedures for acquiring shares in exchange for vouchers at open auction in which all willing buyers participate have not yet been definitely determined. An experiment with the large-scale enterprise "Eleks" in Vladimir, which produces televisions and computers, is of note. In the government's opinion, this experiment can become an example for other privatizations and will demonstrate to many citizens how to use their vouchers. Those who wish to acquire shares of "Eleks," but choose not to name an acceptable price for these shares, hand in a demand to the State Property Administration *(Goskomimushchestvo)* indicating the number of shares they wish to buy. These people make up the first group of buyers. Those who are bolder and prepared to suggest a price form the second group; they turn in a bid indicating the number of vouchers they are prepared to exchange for a certain number of shares.

The State Property Administration then determines a base price for the shares by dividing the face value of the total number of shares demanded by the first group by the number of shares being offered for sale. Next, all bids of the second group lower than the base price are thrown out. The final price is established by calculating the mean of the weighted value of the total number of demands at the base price and the total value of bids exceeding the base price. Practice will show how workable these procedures are and whether or not they allow for the real price of the shares to be determined.

By the end of 1992, the more than 2,000 enterprises that privatized, in roughly equal proportions according to one of the two government plans had received the necessary legalization of the government. Characteristically, the workers of the largest auto factory in Volzhsk preferred the second plan, which gave them control of the enterprise and provided considerable profits derived from the difference between the book and real value of the enterprise. The advantages received by workers of the most modern and more or less efficiently functioning enterprises when they trade their vouchers for shares explains why they are buying up vouchers from the rest of the population. The industrial elite's acquisition of vouchers on the cheap is becoming a more widespread phenomenon and is troubling to public opinion.

As for the practical realization of the government's privatization program, criticism of both its conception and implementation is intensifying. Correcting the government's chosen course is becoming more and more urgent. Ideal solutions are altogether impossible, yet it is highly desirable to reduce the social and economic costs of so cardinal a reform to a minimum. Otherwise a struggle for the *next* redistribution of what was once "nobody's" property will break out.

Above all, the aspiration to do away with state property in one fell swoop in a short

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period of time, using two to three standard privatization plans, must be called into question. This process does not account for the diversity of concrete working conditions of different types of enterprises in various branches of the economy. Critics perceive a common theme in the government's plans for all-out stock issuance and "avalanche" privatization: a curtailment of state participation in economic activity and excessive deregulation of the economy. In their opinion, it is a mistake to suppose that state property is under all conditions absolutely inefficient, that the state must relieve itself of a maximum of regulatory functions in a period of market transformation, and that one must get rid of state property as quickly and entirely as possible, regardless of the price. In confirmation of this argument, they refer to the experience of privatization in Germany, France, Italy, and Hungary. In these countries it is precisely the government and not market forces or worker collectives, that implements privatization and regulates the economic activity of the firms subject to the privatization process. As a result of hasty and poorly prepared privatization, Russian enterprises have lost their status as state property but have not begun to work better—they have only raised the prices on their goods and services.

The Russian government's plan of using vouchers for privatization has many hidden dangers. By this I do not mean only the reinforcement of social inequality and the redistribution of property in favor of certain groups of the population at the expense of others (for example, workers in public health, education, culture, employees of various institutes, not to mention the peasantry). The present injustice can probably be alleviated by broadening the use of vouchers or by issuing additional vouchers for the acquisition of land, apartments, and other property not yet involved in privatization. The dispersion of property and the preservation of control over its use is becoming the more serious problem. When property is dispersed among numerous, and often random, owners, the tendency to use income for consumption at the expense of future savings and renewal of fixed capital is reinforced.

The sketchiness of many of the economic, legal, and technical details of voucher privatization creates the impression that this course was foisted upon the government. The government remains unconvinced of the plan's expediency and is not making any particular effort to ensure its success. Meanwhile, the social gravity of the problem and the threat that many manufacturers will be disrupted by a change in owners force us to consider future steps for a more considered and carefully elaborated privatization.

However paradoxical it may sound, one must be concerned with state property—property that, within fixed limits, needs to be preserved and that in many cases does not lend itself to rapid privatization. In Russia the state does not carry out the functions of a property owner in the generally accepted sense of Western practice. Russian state enterprises do not bear those responsibilities of an owner borne by enterprises belonging to the state in, say, France or Italy. The government appears powerless to restrain these enterprises' group egotism, compel them to strictly follow established rules, or accurately fulfill their budgetary obligations. The destruction of the central industrial ministries that formerly controlled and managed the state enterprises and the rise of "concerns" and similar structures with sloppily defined functions and rights in their place has pretty much left state enterprises to their own devices. Not yet possessing ownership rights, these enterprises have begun nevertheless to pursue their own interests. Thus even before formal privatization is implemented according to one or the other plan, directors and managers have taken control of the enterprises.

Even in its most consistent and democratic forms, privatization runs up against the determined opposition of old structures. This is distinctly visible in the agonizing passage through Parliament of recognition of the right to private ownership of land and authorization of its sale and purchase. Collective and state farms (*kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*), having received land for free and indefinite use in the past, do not want to let this land slip out of their hands. Their chairmen act as the factual owners of the

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land, often leasing it to farmers on crushing terms while allotting the worst lands and often arbitrarily abrogating the lease agreements.

Other circumstances also impede mass privatization. Specifically, the demarcation of state property between federal and local levels has dragged on. Skirmishes between officials over what property should be left to the autonomous republics, regions, and cities, over what will become municipal property and whether or not this latter should be privatized last, continue to this day.

With intelligent methods, privatization in Russia can strengthen the market and the monetary system, as it will increase the supply of goods and distribute property to broad sectors of the population. The newly arising middle class—interested in the development of market relations and, in the future, in increasing production and accumulating property—will become the guarantee of the irreversibility of reform.

Unfortunately, privatization in posttotalitarian societies often acquires perverted forms. The former nomenklatura, who aspire to exchange the political power now escaping them for property (the power of which is far more durable), find it is easier to get the hang of partitioning state property. If "nomenklatura privatization" achieves a massive dimension, however, it is capable of engendering acute social conflicts and impeding democratization. At the moment, we are still far from the optimal solution to the problem of privatization.

Translated from
the Russian by
PEGGY MCINERNY □

After this article was received, we asked the author several clarifying questions. He very kindly provided answers, and below we print the questions and the answers:

Dissent: To what do you attribute the errors and failures of the Gaidar economic team?

OB: I attribute the errors and failures of the Gaidar team's economic policy to several circumstances. First of all, in the post-putsch euphoria and enthusiasm, Yeltsin and Gaidar didn't want to lose time in carrying out unpopular measures for a sharp reduction in the population's consumption. The aspiration to demonstrate as soon as possible a resoluteness in the transition to the market did not permit the reforms to be well thought out or prepared, or all the risks and consequences associated with them to be weighed.

The self-confidence and ambitiousness of the architects of reform, their complete lack of any experience of government management or knowledge of economic practice on the micro-level, was telling. To this was added the support of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and a number of Western experts for Gaidar's policy, an uncritical assessment of the Polish and Bulgarian experiences of "shock therapy," and, not least, a passion for monetarist conceptions—a dogmatic faith in "Friedmanism."

Dissent: Can you say a little more on why and how the voucher arrangement has not succeeded?

OB: The move to issue vouchers was very rushed and poorly elaborated in its technical details. In addition, the fact that the vouchers involve an insignificant part of the national wealth creates the impression of a forced concession to public opinion, an attempt to throw a bone to a population that has been deprived of its savings and watches as cunning people and the old nomenklatura devote themselves to the appropriation, of national property. The government was forced to adopt the idea of vouchers, although internally it didn't consider the idea correct. By this I mean that "voucherization" has a weak impact on the property status of the majority of the population, but allows those people possessed of power and holding the levers of management to rapidly enrich themselves.

Dissent: How do you determine beforehand the real value of property to be privatized?

OB: In the absence of a developed market, one can determine the market value of property being privatized only with a great degree of approximation, on the basis of expert appraisal by specialists, including specialists from West-

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ern consulting and auditing firms. The likely errors can be corrected in the future. However, if we want to create an anchor for a monetary system, it's important to know approximately the value in hard currency and real prices of that which is put on the market. The land and its minerals, the forests, houses, and so on, having become goods, become a better guarantee of money and a powerful means for restraining inflation.

Dissent: Who is responsible for the distortions in the policies of privatization?

OB: The wild, uncivilized forms in which market relations are beginning to develop in Russia are, for the most part, the result of state policy. The inability of state authorities to establish a strict legislative order and then guarantee its observance in trade, banking matters, accounting, quality standards, contractual obligations, the overcoming of monopolies and corruption, and, finally, in privatization itself, all lead to the aforementioned perversions. A monstrous redistribution of wealth is taking place, as a result of which the overwhelming majority of the population is being reduced to beggary save for a few percent—by no means the most talented and competent people, but the most cunning and lacking in moral conscience or respect for laws—who are becoming unspeakably rich. Organized crime, joined to government structures and with international links, is increasing. This crime is becoming a behind-the-scenes political force; the process of privatization is in many respects accommodating itself to its interests, of which many examples are already at hand.

Dissent: What kinds of structural changes would you favor in the Russian economy?

OB: My point of view is that privatization must take a variety of forms depending on the nature, scale, and technical and organizational level of the enterprise to be privatized. Two or three paradigms are not adequate, given the mutiplicity of conditions operating in individual enterprises, hence the negative consequences of similar privatization cannot be excluded.

In larger enterprises, where the plan is for the work collective to buy out 51 percent of the operation, the speed of privatization is worrisome. This may complicate the creation of substantial multinational corporations on the territory of the former Soviet Union. It may also complicate the retaining of interrepublican industrial systems that already exist in automobile and airplane manufacturing, atomic materials, and so on. Moreover, there is a danger that when the collectives of such an enterprise become its owner, they will prefer to increase their own earnings at the expense of capitalization and investment. Similarly, the group interests of the collectives may dominate at the expense of general national interests, especially since many enterprises have de facto monopolies on their industry and can dictate terms. I therefore strongly object to hurrying the privatization of major enterprises. It would be better to keep them under government ownership and under government control while shifting their production to competitive market conditions to cover current expenses and capital investment without outside aid. Privatization could follow such a stage of commercialization in the form of joint-stock companies, if conditions warranted.

For small and mid-level industrial enterprises "management buy-outs" might be the most appropriate form of privatization, while goods and services could be auctioned off. In both cases vouchers might be the currency of purchase. Privatization of land and apartments could best be done, in my view, by free and direct distribution of property or via sale for vouchers. □

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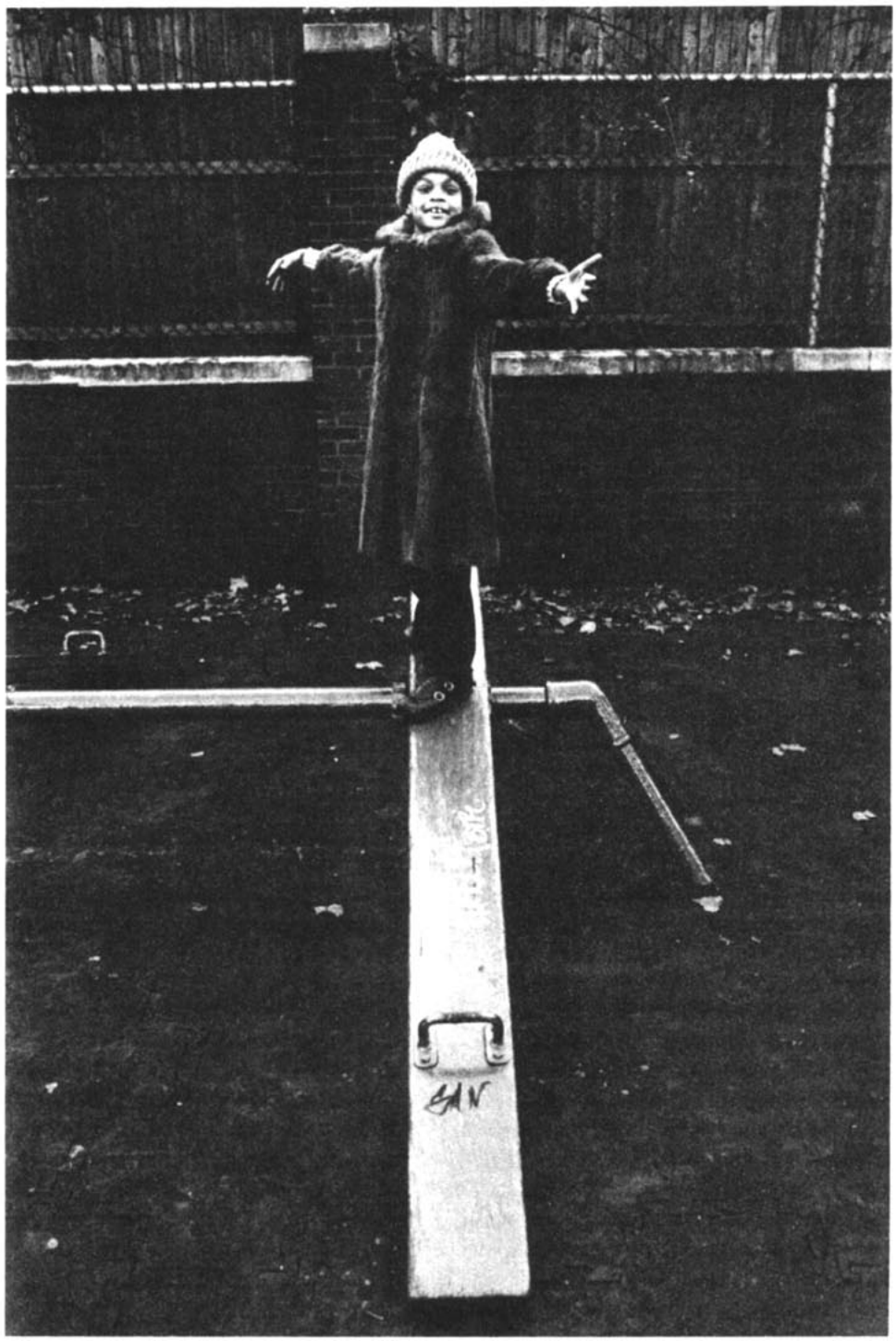

George Cohen /IMPACT VISUALS

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DEFENDING OUR CHILDREN

Edited by Maxine Phillips

A familiar scene. Tired mother returns from work. Picks up two-year-old from day-care center. Arrives home to find eight-year-old and ten-year-old locked in mortal combat. Separates them and screams at everyone. Goes in kitchen to start supper. Two-year-old whines. Fight continues in living room. She's at the end of her rope.

Change of scene. Rushing to the phone, she dials 911-PARENTS, and within minutes a brightly colored Parentmobile turns into the driveway. Out jump five para-parents, equipment ready. Storybook in hand, one scoops up the two-year-old. Two more target the living room, where one peels off to help the ten-year-old with homework, and the other engages the eight-year-old in a discussion of her favorite television shows. The fourth enters the kitchen, ready to fix dinner, while the fifth runs the bubble bath and leads the mother off for a back rub. Pure fantasy, but when parent advocate Patty Wipfler tells the story, her audiences clearly wish otherwise.

The true part is that parenting is one tough job, for which the proper ratio of adults to children is three adults to one child. However, in the United States parenting is considered a hobby, similar to pet ownership. It's something you take up if you have enough money, time, and resources. If you don't, you're not supposed to try to join the club.

Fortunately or unfortunately, many people have joined the club, and, as Marshall Berman describes in his essay, they struggle against all odds to make sure that their children will have a better life than they did. If parents share one characteristic other than that, it is worry—worry that the precarious web of supports they have built for their families will crash, worry about how their children behave in public or perform in school, worry that they don't know what they're doing, and even if they did, that they don't know how they're going to do it. In this, one of the most intimate of relationships, it is certainly true that the personal is political. Society treats almost every aspect of child-rearing as a completely personal experience, as if the quality of children's lives had no bearing on the quality of our citizenry, our work force, our life together. If anything "goes wrong" with the children, parents take the blame, whether because they were absent fathers, overinvolved mothers, too strict, too permissive, drug-addicted, had too many children of the wrong race and class, the list is endless.

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But if, as Nancy Amidei proposes, there finally exists a national consensus that our societal treatment of children is shameful, then it is the maligned parents and others connected to children who must shape the political will to save our children's lives. It is they who must find the time for the hard work of political organizing that must be done on top of their paid work and their unpaid child-care labor.

In the following articles the authors focus on a few areas in which changes would make an enormous difference in the lives of all our children. Herb Kohl urges educators to ally themselves with parents to defend decent public education and abolish stigmatizing categories that impede education. David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz remind us that some of the seemingly intractable problems we face in foster care had not-so-distant historical roots in racist practices.

Ultimately, though, as Nancy Amidei says, it does not matter which area you choose to focus on. Improving the lives of children at any point along the continuum is worth doing. So why not do it?—M.P.

Dissent thanks the New-Land Foundation and the Menemsha Fund for their support of this special section.

How American Children Are Doing

KIDS COUNT Benchmark	National Trends Over the 1980s	State Trends
Percent low birth weight babies	3% WORSE	35 states worse*
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	22% BETTER	51 states better*
Child death rate ages 1-14 (per 100,000 children)	18% BETTER	48 states better*
Teen violent death rate ages 15-19 (per 100,000 teens)	11% WORSE	34 states worse*
Percent all births that are to single teens	14% WORSE	42 states worse
Juvenile custody rate ages 10-15 (per 100,000 youths)	10% WORSE	32 states worse*
Percent graduating high school	0% NO CHANGE	28 states better
Percent children in poverty	22% WORSE	40 states worse
Percent children in single-parent families	13% WORSE	44 states worse

*Includes the District of Columbia.

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Nancy Amidei

CHILD ADVOCACY

Let's Get the Job Done

This is a story that asks a question. First the story.

Once upon a time there was a land so rich in resources that people beyond its borders thought the streets must be paved with gold. But it was so poor in spirit that it surrounded its children with violence and left them hungry, homeless, ignored. Over time the consequences of that neglect became increasingly evident, until one day, the plight of the children could no longer be ignored. Finally, it seemed, attention would be paid.

Now the question: What will it take to speed up the process?

This question haunts advocates for vulnerable children. It isn't that no one would speak for the children; they have. But in the United States their warnings rarely resulted in anything more than a token response. Victories have tended to be piecemeal, grudging, never enough to change the conditions that put so many children at risk in the first place. Or the reforms are left unimplemented, without the money needed to carry them out. Throughout the twentieth century that has been the case.

In the early decades advocates were strong enough to win creation of a federal Children's Bureau and child-labor laws, and in 1935 to win provisions in the Social Security Act for maternal and child health programs, child welfare services, and income supports for needy children (the precursor to AFDC). Making good on those victories is another matter: in the 1990s migrant children still labor in fields without clean water or sanitation; the lack of basic prenatal care still contributes to infant mortality rates that are among the highest in the industrialized world; and every year abused and neglected children die while already in state care.

It is not that no one ever tried for a stronger commitment to our children. One turning point came in the 1960s when a report by the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children called for a consistent voice for children: child advocacy offices in Washington, D.C. and every state. The idea had such strong support that Senator Abraham Ribicoff attached it to the child-care bill then moving through the Congress. In that climate, several governors established offices for children and youth, as did many independent groups; a number of today's best-known child advocacy organizations can be traced to that time. When Richard Nixon vetoed the child-care bill in 1972, the Ribicoff amendment went down with it, but an infrastructure for child advocacy was in place.

Through much of the 1960s and 1970s advocates learned that no matter whether they targeted public or private resources, they got some of their best results by organizing around specific issues with discrete and directly affected constituencies. Groups sprang up around such diverse issues as children born with spina bifida, Head Start programs, families who'd lost a child to crib death, teachers of autistic children, and adults concerned with how the courts treat children. So long as funds (public and private) continued to flow along categorical lines and public budgets were expanding, a categorical, highly intensive form of organizing and advocacy often was best for winning immediate, tangible results. But countless small cate-

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gorical fiefdoms do not a rational, user-friendly system make. Before long many children in desperate need were falling through the cracks; for too many children the array of categorical programs presented almost as many barriers as opportunities.

The 1980s only made things worse. A deep recession affected private as well as public giving, public budgets were slashed, and the prevailing philosophy in the White House was a commitment to ending the social welfare role of government. In that context, issue-specific movements made less sense. "Victory" became a misnomer if protecting Medicaid services for low-income children meant less money for free school meals or low-cost housing—particularly when the same children were likely to need all three. Almost by default, the 1980s forced children's advocates to forge a new kind of coalition politics.

Ironically, that process was spurred a bit by the Reagan-era belief that when the taxes of the wealthy individuals and corporations were reduced, they would help to fill the gaps, for example, by volunteering for the service agencies whose budgets were being slashed. It was a hollow notion (wealthy volunteers did not make up for lost operating funds), but it had an interesting side effect. Children's organizations were among the social agencies that began inviting wealthy conservatives onto their boards. Those who accepted the invitations then became informed about the needs of their adopted agencies and the inadequacy of volunteer efforts for the task. By the end of the decade some were even among the voices for a more aggressive government role in children's services—including wealthy Orange County, California, conservatives, who fought for welfare expansion after learning that "volunteering" wouldn't pay the six-figure health-care costs of the babies born to their agency's high-risk teens, and Utah's conservative Senator Orrin Hatch, who became persuaded of the need for federal child-care legislation.

Signs of Hope

Fortunately the changes of the 1980s went beyond a handful of powerful individuals and some new strategic thinking. If there is reason for hope as the United States lurches toward the twenty-first century, it is in part because of shifts that occurred in the eighties. Five of these changes deserve special mention, because they frame the context in which any next steps will be taken.

1. National opinion surveys record a striking change in the attitudes of the general public. Long before the 1992 election results were in, a growing majority of Americans were telling pollsters they would be more inclined to vote for candidates with children's issues on their agendas (67 percent), and would even be willing to pay higher taxes if they felt confident the money would be used to help children (59 percent). In November 1991, over 60 percent of adults in a national poll said the top priority for the use of tax dollars should be to "guarantee all children health care, quality education, safe neighborhoods, and economic security." Few (just one in five) think we can't afford to spend more for children because of the deficit, and most (over 80 percent in an Arizona poll) think we'll pay more later if we fail to invest now in programs for children.

That helps explain why, for example, there have been successful advocacy campaigns in Florida to create special taxing districts for children's services at the county level, and why San Francisco voters agreed in 1991 to set aside a portion of tax revenues to fund children's services.

2. The attitudes of the business community have changed. Since the late 1980s, when the Committee for Economic Development (consisting of the CEOs of over a hundred major corporations) helped push national child-care legislation through the 101st Congress, business-community leaders have gradually become more aware of the needs and more active in support of quality services for children. If we fail to invest in our children, they argue, before long we will no longer be productive at home or competitive abroad. Their interests are as much commercial as humanitarian, but the results are the same: meeting children's needs is becoming part of the business community's agenda.

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3. The media's response has changed. Stories related to dependent care, child care, or education reforms used to be confined to the "Women's Page," or written as neighborhood news; now they are likely to be covered on the business pages or in front-section news and editorial columns. Radio and television now devote far more attention to such issues as child abuse, child care, child health, and education reforms. Today, media decision makers see children's issues as "hot."

4. There has been a change in the agendas of the nation's policymakers. Federal, state, and local lawmakers now spend more of their time on issues important to children—everything from condoms and clinics in the schools or family leave in the workplace to how children fare in the budget. The 101st Congress (1989–1990) enacted nearly a dozen major child-related laws, thanks in part to the presence of two women in the Senate and twenty-nine women in the House. As data compiled by Rutgers University's Center for the American Woman and Politics has shown, women elected officials focus more on social issues such as women's roles as caregivers in family and society, and—conservative or liberal—are likely to compile more progressive voting records on those issues than their male counterparts.

The virtual doubling of women in the Congress and the election of many more women officials at state and local levels nationwide are among the reasons the 1992 election results bode well for children's issues.

5. The last change worth noting is to some degree responsible for all the others: the advocacy community has changed. Over the years it has gotten broader, deeper, and more sophisticated. Until fairly recently, child advocates were more typically liberals, comfortable with the notion of activist government, and drawn from a fairly narrow band of associations—including mainline churches, helping professions, and the solid (but usually unmoneyed) middle class. That helps explain why significant changes proposed in the past did not win passage, or were so watered-down as to be scarcely worth having.

By now child advocates come from all political persuasions, all professions, all classes, all regions of the country. The fight for federal child-care legislation, which helps defray the costs of child care for poor families, was a case in point. From the time when advocates first got together to develop a draft bill in 1986, through enactment in 1990, the campaign to win a federal child-care bill was a model of national sophistication and broad-based, grass-roots passion. Those who credit the bill's success to "changing demographics" forget that low-income women have always been in the paid work force, and two-earner families of every income group have always faced child-care problems. The new element was that this time they organized politically.

Similar accounts could be given for all the other issues that produced legislative victories on behalf of children in a time of rising voter cynicism and shrinking budgets: the fight to expand Medicaid to cover more high-risk pregnant women and children, to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-earning families with children, to win a Younger Americans Act and a Youth Services Act, to win funding for cities hard hit by AIDS and to reform children's mental health services, as well as court battles to win disability coverage for emotionally disturbed children or representation rights for abused and neglected children, and more.

Along the way, so many new statewide, regional, and municipal child advocacy groups have sprung up that a National Association of Child Advocates has formed. Such associations help assure that all advocacy groups, including the newest and smallest, can profit from the experience of others. (Using the national networks, for example, successful San Francisco advocates for a tax set-aside for children's services learned from the experience of tax-raising initiatives that failed elsewhere.)

One measure of child advocates' growing sophistication could be seen during the 1992 campaigns, in the form of an unprecedented joint national effort. Calling themselves the Coalition for America's Children, the original steering group of a dozen or so included children's hospitals, educators, the Association

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of Junior Leagues, and the Association of Child Advocates. They used common polling and focus-group information to develop a single bipartisan message ("Who's For Kids and Who's Just Kidding"), along with common logos, videos, and information kits. This collaboration sharply increased the likelihood of children's issues being part of political campaigns waged at every level.

And yet . . . . Child advocates may have a growing mastery of the policy process, but they've also faced years of escalating numbers and worsening needs. They are discouraged and tired. Fred Brancato, who deals with New York City children needing out-of-home care, observes, "We used to get children needing 'rehabilitation,' but many of the children needing care now have never been 'habilitated.' " That is a whole new ballgame for advocates and service providers. There is an almost manic sense of urgency; for too many children, time is running out.

And always there is the nagging question: Given all that is known—about lead-paint poisoning, low birthweight, hunger, homelessness, poverty, violence—why is there still so little action? Why do we take such cautious steps in support of actions known to be effective, while tolerating policies known to continue or increase the harm? Why are we so slow to change the systems that are failing our children (education, health, child protection), given how well and how often the needs and solutions have been set out? And, when the consequences of not acting have been documented for so long and the case is so compelling, what more will it take to quicken the pace?

Impediments to Action

As discussions with child advocates around the country reveal, there is no single answer, but these veterans identify five elements that begin to explain our national inaction on behalf of children:

- Children don't fare better in the political arena because they don't vote, and because we don't yet agree on the proper role of government in the lives of children;
- Americans feel deep ambivalence toward families in need: torn between wanting to help the children and wanting to punish the parents;
- Children in trouble are seen as "other people's" (that is, children of color, of immigrants, of poor parents) whereas "our" children (read: white, middle class) are doing just fine—suggesting that an underlying racism or elitism is the real enemy;
- It is always difficult to get policymakers to put tax dollars into efforts that may not pay off for years, reflecting a political system that feeds on publicity and quick results, rather than long-term investments and proven cases; and
- Americans like winners, and children are beginning to be seen as losers. It is as though the circuits capable of taking in bad news have been overloaded: being aware of the problems translates into being overwhelmed by them.

If these observations help explain our national inaction, then all is not lost; each is to some degree amenable to action. Moreover, all are in some form already on the advocates' agendas, and all will be helped by the changes that have taken place in public attitudes, the media, the business community, the policymakers, and the advocacy community itself. The challenge for earlier times was to document the needs and bring them to the attention of public and policy makers alike; that is largely accomplished. Now it falls to advocates to deal directly with some of the reasons for inaction and join quickly around a few specific proposals for which a consensus is already partly formed.

For the future, then, task #1 is a continuation of work underway: to broaden and politicize the base. Children may not vote, but their parents (teachers, doctors, grandparents) do, and they can be mobilized. However, in the 1992 campaigns the leaders were sometimes ahead of the troops. That is, helped by computer bulletin boards, newsletters, and training, some advocacy groups were able to issue reports and attract media attention before they'd actually built a membership base

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capable of acting politically. Now the organizing efforts have to catch up with the technology. The same groups that have learned to issue "report cards" on legislators and agencies must build the capacity to "flunk" them when they don't respond.

Child advocates are also working on better ways to humanize the issues for the policy makers, without exploiting children who may be troubled or in pain. For a host of reasons related to confidentiality and privacy it is difficult to politicize the harm being done to children. "We can't fill the rotundas with abused and wounded kids," says Washington state lobbyist Margaret Casey. And "politicizing" is doubly hard when the harm isn't easily quantified or seen—as in the case of emotional abuse, or neglect. Neglecting children leads to death more often than does physical abuse, but it is much harder to detect. (That's true in the political arena as well. If legislators went into the homes of poor children and physically abused them, there would be a public outcry. But when public officials neglect abused or troubled children through inadequate budgets, untrained and overloaded child welfare workers, or subpoverty welfare grants, there is little outcry—though the consequences may be more devastating and long lasting.)

Task #2 requires building the societal consensus for a shared responsibility for children. Americans feel a deeply ingrained reluctance to have government involved in what are seen as family affairs. It took decades to develop a consensus around the proper role of government in the lives of senior citizens; now we agree that when people can no longer work, there is an obligation to provide a minimal level of support and care. A similar consensus about the role of government in the lives of young children with parents is still evolving. Parents have variously been regarded as the virtual owners of their children (and government an unwelcome intruder), and at other times as the guardians of a sacred trust. And always there have been different rules and expectations depending upon whether the parents and children were rich or poor, and whether their reasons for needing help are deemed worthy. Advocates need to help clarify what constitutes a private family matter and what a matter for public concern.

Their task will not be made easier by the growing sentiment that government—not normally regarded as a good parent—should move more quickly to substitute itself for parents who abuse or neglect their children. Or, as Elizabeth Wickenden has noted, by the fact that the children we want government to help come attached to parents we don't much like. The prejudice against poor, single parents runs very deep. That's why what appears to be a debate about the use of government funds to sustain life, subsidize child care, or provide for temporary foster care, may—depending on one's perspective—conjure up the image of government as helpmate or as a threat to parental rights.

The job of changing the old mindset is already underway. It is a small step, but significant, that the theme used by the Coalition for America's Children during the 1992 campaigns—"It takes a village to raise a child"—has been cropping up ever since. The notion of a broad societal responsibility for all of a community's children appears to be catching on.

Task #3 involves taking on any implicit racism or classism underlying inaction. When Marion Wright Edelman started the Children's Defense Fund, it was in part to find a new route to improved civil rights. Since the children at greatest risk came disproportionately from communities of color, focusing on them afforded a less threatening route to improved race relations. That is still true, and it is in that spirit that some children's advocates are working to change attitudes toward welfare families by shifting the debate away from "those women" and onto the need to move their children up and out of poverty.

But by now there is also strong evidence that intolerance of any kind, including that based on class or welfare receipt, cannot go unchallenged. Members of a Utah-based group called POUNCE (*P*eople *O*pposed to *UN*fair *C*haracterizations *E*verywhere) represent one approach. They pledge to "pounce" on public

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officials and others who resort to unfair, unfounded stereotypes about welfare families, racial minorities, and others.

And despite tight budgets, there has been renewed interest in universal solutions as one way to minimize class and racial tensions. Viewing children's services as a basic responsibility of government, for example, to be financed from general tax revenues and available to all children, would diffuse many of the race and class tensions distorting current policy debates. It has that effect in European countries. Where it is standard for the parents of all young children to stay home without losing their jobs there is less need for governments to be concerned with the problems of particular parents, the special problems surrounding infant care and sick child care, or any of the "behavior modification" experiments now masquerading as welfare reforms.

Task #4 lies in focusing on prevention. We Americans have a tendency to wait until there is a crisis rather than invest up-front in heading off the problem. But other industrial countries invest more in prevention than we do, and evidence of its value can be put to good use—as the cross-national studies of Columbia University professors Sheila Kammerman and Alfred Kahn show.

For home-grown comparisons, we can point to Alabama, whose infant mortality rates and other health indices improved after it began spending more on prenatal care and shifted to a focus on prevention. Since Hawaii became the one state in the nation with universal health coverage and a clear emphasis on prevention, it has racked up some of the nation's best health statistics—even for groups that are usually thought to be at high risk. The long-term effects of programs like Head Start and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Food Program) are well known; similar evidence exists with respect to early child development, teen-pregnancy prevention, and a variety of education and social services.

Task #5 involves taking on the "it's-all-too-big-to-handle" backlash. Making complex problems understandable is what good advocacy is all about. Lisbeth Schorr made the case brilliantly in her 1988 book *Within Our Reach*. Not only did she offer evidence that we know what works in several key areas of concern (especially preventing teen pregnancy, dropping out of school, and getting in trouble with the law); she argued convincingly that alleviating any one of the problems facing children reduces the harmful effects of all the others. For example, if it is only possible to assure that poor pregnant teens get early prenatal care, then it's worth doing—even if the teen remains poor, poorly housed, or faced with other problems. Each will be less devastating for the teen and her baby if prenatal care is assured.

If there is a note of bad news in the changes of recent years, or any leitmotiv to the start of the Clinton administration and the 103rd Congress, it is money. Dominating all policy debates this year are twin concerns: how big the deficits (state and federal) and how small the will for new revenues. Advocates are as conscious of the problem as anyone. As Wendy Lazarus, a vice-president of California's CHILDREN NOW points out, the timing is bad. Just as children's groups are building real constituencies, public budgets at all levels are collapsing. And while she is quick to point out that more money isn't the only answer, it is the right answer when demonstrably effective, life-changing benefits still reach only a fraction of the children eligible.

That said, money will be raised and spent by Congress and the new administration; money will be raised and spent by countless local charities and corporations. Even in the face of shrinking budgets, choices will be made. It is time to put children at the top of the list for a change. One way to acknowledge that resources are limited while still being an advocate for children is by focusing some attention on a practical, minimalist plan that puts children first and enjoys a broad consensus. Several have been proposed in recent years (such as the Children's Defense Fund's "Leave No Child Behind" campaign); all include elements of health, education, and income support. The argument is not that children

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deserve a claim on all available money. Rather, it is that a country that takes the plight of its children seriously would give these items the first attention, the first dollars. Until they are dealt with, other policy initiatives would be put on hold. Happily, these items involve no significant problems of technical design, offer the promise of future savings, and already enjoy broad support. The only issue is initial cost.

Practical Steps

First, there is the matter of poverty. Plans to bring low-income families with children above the poverty line (or higher if desired) through the use of refundable tax credits are readily available and should be aggressively pursued. Most would build on the Earned Income Credit and other devices already in the tax code, and some are related to proposals for more aggressive enforcement of child support. Thus, if there are to be any changes in the tax code, changes to shore up poor families with children should come first. The principal barrier is cost, though there would be large future savings in medical care, remedial education, and social welfare expenditures, along with future social and economic benefits.

Second, there is our disturbingly high infant mortality rate—another topic on which both problems and solutions are well known. The measures needed to reduce infant mortality would also have the effect of reducing low birthweight in infants, which in turn is related to higher rates of ill health, disability, learning disorders, sensory-nervous system disorders, and a generally higher risk of lifetime health and education difficulties. Here, too, there are proposals largely in hand. The demonstrably successful WIC program is in place all over the country; it should be fully funded. Or we could adopt the proposal developed by maternal and child health experts for "Universal Free Maternity Care." Using data showing that poor pregnancy outcome is a leading cause of uncompensated care provided in hospitals, analysts can show that the additional services would soon pay for themselves.

Third, there is the issue of education. Particular comprehensive education reforms do not yet enjoy a consensus, but two elements of the many recent proposals do. Head Start, with its record of proven success, could be fully funded and expanded to provide more full-day care for very young children from working families.

Then, for older children, school and class-

A Profile of Poor Children in America

Out of 100 poor children in America:

40 are white, non-Latino.
34 are black.
22 are Latino.
5 are Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, or Alaskan Native.

37 live in married-couple families.
59 live in female-headed families.
4 live in male-headed families.

62 live in families with at least one worker.
17 live in families with two or more workers.
22 live in families with at least one full-time, year-round worker.

45 live in central cities.
32 live in suburban areas.
24 live in rural areas.

44 live in families with incomes of less than half the poverty level ($6,962 for a family of four).

40 are younger than six.

11 live in families headed by persons younger than 25.

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room size should be reduced. In schools where the teachers and principals know the children, they are better able to prevent dropping out, retard absenteeism, and increase the possibilities for learning. Once again, money, not design, is the principal issue.

Focusing on efforts that cost money is not entirely unrealistic. We have underspent on children for so long that some new spending is necessary. Moreover, billions of dollars will be available from savings in military spending (thanks to Ron Dellums's new role as chair of the House Armed Services Committee, the very amounts under consideration will be higher). A broad-based campaign might capture some of that money for children first, and for competing interests (deficit reduction, infrastructure improvements, more tax breaks) later.

But if all this sounds too polite, too nice—it is. It is obscene that in a nation as rich as ours we continue to worry over the language we use or the possibility that someone might be offended by plans that sound idealistic, while year after year the quality of life for our children declines. It is not a cliché to say that these are matters of life or death: in America every year, thousands of children die unnecessarily because of choices made by adults who know better.

Progress toward securing basic health, education, and income support will not come easily, but it would make a dramatic difference in children's lives. Done right, the effort would strengthen our sense of community and mutual responsibility for the vulnerable among us, remove some of the reasons for voters' distrust of their government, and give hope to troubled communities.

An administration presided over by the Clintons and the Gores (all four avowed advocates for children and families) and a new Congress with record numbers of women and people of color hold out additional reason for hope. The nation's economy will not be quickly repaired, but it is clear that new priorities will guide the allocation of whatever dollars there are.

So the story that began by asking a question ends by providing a sobering answer. It is in part about national leadership, and because we are a democracy, it is about each of us as well. We elect and re-elect political leaders whose priorities are askew. We tolerate tax and budget choices we know will harm children. We make excuses for community leaders who claim to know how to run a business or a government, but not to understand why prenatal care is important or how child welfare services work. And meanwhile, year after year children die.

To paraphrase the president, in the depth of winter, we must force the spring. □

To Our Readers

We are happy to report that the bi-annual *Dissent* fund drive this past autumn netted a little more than the $90,000 we had set as our goal, thereby ensuring the survival of the magazine for the next two years. To those who contributed, whether in large or small amounts, we extend our warmest thanks.—EDS.

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Marshall Berman

CHILDREN OF THE FUTURE

Children of the future Age
Reading this indignant page,
Know that in a former time
Love! sweet Love! was thought a crime . . . .
—William Blake, "A Little Girl Lost," 1790s

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had,
And add some new ones, just for you . . . .
—Philip Larkin, "This Be the Verse," 1970s

One of the marks of modern times is that masses of ordinary people have come to believe that their children's lives could be a lot better than their own. Over the last two centuries, as the world has opened up, this belief has become one of the driving forces for mass migration. People sell all they have, travel steerage, often declass themselves, anything to get out; when they land, they live in wretched slums, work themselves to death in jobs the natives won't accept, put up with vicious insults and injuries (and every time and place has a racist and xenophobic repertory all its own), subject themselves to enormous amounts of crap, and *alles fur die kindelech*, everything for the kids, as they used to say when I was a kid. They still say it, the Russian bakers and Indian stationers and Korean fruit-and-vegetable people on my block, and the parents of my students at CCNY, in more languages than I can keep track of. Their deepest belief—sometimes, it seems, their only belief—is a belief in progress. "Children of the future age," William Blake's lyrical invocation, evokes this romantic faith. The speaker in Blake's poem is wretched in the present age, but confident that his (her?) children's generation will enjoy a glorious future; the children of the future will be so free and radiant that they will need poetry to feel and understand their parents' inner wounds.

Alas, in the history of culture as much as in the history of families, children tend not to appreciate parental sacrifice; they often come to feel it's they themselves who are the lambs, and their parents' visionary hopes are bonds that chain and crush them. Again and again, since the Age of Revolutions, romantic faith in the future has generated a dialectical antithesis, a counter-romance. Sometimes this grim myth has appeared as a counter-American Dream, as in all the great American plays—by Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard—about children who are crushed by their parents and/or their parents' sins. In the Punk Rock of the 1970s, the myth took the form of a counter-Woodstock, spat into the face of the 1960s: "I belong to the blank generation" said Richard Hell and the Voidoids; the Sex Pistols said, "We are the future/there is no future"; one group called themselves Devo, in honor of humanity's Devolution. Christopher Lasch expounded this sort of theory in academic language in his 1970s cultural studies, *The Culture of Narcissism* and *Haven in a Heartless*

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World, which proclaimed as an incontrovertible fact of modern life "the death of the family." The generally genteel poet Philip Larkin, England's Poet Laureate, when he wrote about the family, sounded just like a punk. His poem, quoted above, reads like an apotheosis of the family counter-romance. His rap ends with Swiftian nihilism:

> *Man hands on misery to man.*
> *It deepens like a coastal shelf.*
> *Get out as early as you can,*
> *And don't have any kids yourself.*

Like the Grinch who stole Christmas, this guy wants to grab hold of everybody's family hopes and smash them against the wall; then he grins at us wickedly while he stomps the shards, even as his own feet are torn up by the broken glass. But still, he upholds an equation proclaimed by the soppiest sentimentalists: "the family" equals the future; to not have kids is to "get out as early as you can" from life.

It's strange to go through this post-sixties material twenty years later. So many people seemed so sure (some sad, some glad) "the family"—as if there were only one—was "dead." What can they have been thinking of? What was happening was that millions of families were reconfiguring themselves. The big thing is that mothers *en masse* were going to work. Here are some numbers, hot off the presses from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). If we compare the proportion of working mothers—that is, mothers in the labor force with children under seventeen—we find that in thirty years, from March 1962 to March 1992, it has more than doubled: 30 percent for 1962, 67 percent for 1992. The BLS breaks down this statistic into mothers with children from six to seventeen, and those whose children are under six. Since 1962, the percentage of working mothers with children six to seventeen has risen from 42 percent in 1962 to 76 percent in 1992. The most striking rise has been for mothers with children under six: 20 percent were working in 1962, 58 percent in 1992. So the proportion has tripled, and a family structure that was pretty rare thirty years ago has become typical today.

Can we assess mothers' motivations? There are many layers. Outside of the trust-fund set, there are few families that don't simply need the money. Remember, real wages in the United States have been falling since 1973. But the experiences of going out to work, of being part of an enterprise and a work force, of having co-workers, of contributing to something outside one's own household, address more than material needs. Millions of women, over the past two decades—not only women who were proud to be called feminists, but also women who scorned or feared the word—have been learning to apply those old Jeffersonian ideals, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," to their own lives. Many Americans were, and are, disturbed to see the Enlightenment come so close to home. But they shouldn't be surprised. After all, since the 1950s, American society has been going through the most intense agitation, redefining and working through the meaning of civil rights. How much longer could American women be expected to ignore their own?

What looks so weird, twenty years after, is the assumption that once modern women cease to be deferent, they are bound to become indifferent; that given a chance to live for themselves, they will become utterly cruel and uncaring for others—for men and children, for love and nurturing, for any sort of family tie or social bond beyond their momentary whims. So many writers (of both sexes) used to talk this way. Where did they get that perverse equation, FREEDOM = INDIFFERENCE? Was it from John Locke? Or from their own lives? You have to wonder.

In fact, it didn't work that way. What has happened, instead, for the most part, is that men and women discovered how thrilling, as well as grueling, life in a two-income and two-career family could be. Where both people are out in the world, there's more substance of fire, more life to share, more *there* there. Of course, there's not much time for there to be there: a working couple with children pretty much has to make dates to be together, and not many dates will be open. (A comic spinoff:

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sometimes, say in interludes when they find themselves with exactly thirty-five minutes alone, and aren't totally worn out, they can enjoy the *frisson* of an illicit affair. Is this what's meant by "Treat your spouse like a lover"?) Two-income families with children have been forced to develop a vast infrastructure of playgroups and sitters and nannies and day-care centers and after-school programs. Americans over the last twenty years have been very imaginative and resourceful in putting these support systems together, with no government help. (In the United States, unlike Western Europe, the only people who get that help are people already on welfare.) But the scaffolding shakes, the props are precarious, the parents lie awake in bed together at night worrying that somebody (or one body too many) will get sick the next morning and the whole structure will crash.

Sometimes it does split, right down the middle. With women as well as men struggling to be who they are, it's no surprise if both sexes feel under intolerable pressure and put intolerable pressure on each other. Today's couples break up far more often than their parents did. The good news is that over the last decade or so the divorce rate has leveled off; the bad news is that it's leveled off at about one out of two. Divorce today, as much as in the Karenins' day, opens floodgates of rage, guilt, and existential panic. But today the unraveling of marriages doesn't mean the destruction of *families*. Here, too, parents have found or created new structures for support. Family law has developed the institution of joint custody: now there don't have to be zero-sum wars between parents, and children can have two solid homes, and ex-spouses who can't agree on much can agree on this and work like hell to keep it intact for the sake of the children. Single parents have developed elaborate networks to share responsibility for each other's children, so they can get at least some slack to take responsibility for themselves. Meanwhile, ex-wives and ex-husbands, thrown on their own, rarely live like swinging singles (as it used to be thought they would); instead, they tend to fall in love again as soon as they can pick themselves off the floor, form new bonds, start new families, have more children (if they're too old, they adopt), and crowd the betting windows to wager on the future again. Today's children of divorce don't skulk alone in corners, as yesterday's did: they are likely to grow up surrounded by stepparents and godparents and stepsiblings who fill their lives and give them all the love they can take. Moreover, the very pervasiveness of divorce has mostly dissipated its stigma, and given the children, for company, plenty of other children like themselves. In the middle class, they will grow up surrounded by networks of psychiatrists, teachers, social workers, counselors, lawyers, mediators, coaches, tutors, nurturing them and helping them survive their parents even as they help their parents hold them together. All these professional helpers and carers work for money, as they must, and yet, in this *la ronde* whose social boundaries are so fluid, any one of them may turn into something very like family, and turn out to stand by their children and stand up for them for life.

These changes can help explain the spectacular backfire of the GOP's "family values" campaign. That campaign highlighted many of the Clinton family's troubles, especially Bill's adultery (but also his brother's drug addiction), and intimated that it was really all Hillary's fault, not just for going to work, but for thinking her work had some value independent of her husband, and generally for having an attitude and not knowing her place. Simultaneously, the Bush family was held up as a sort of Norman Rockwell icon, a family that had stayed together all these years (photo op: Barbara with grandchildren; keep those sleazy sons off camera, please), supposedly because the wife had given up not only her work but her beliefs—most strikingly, her belief in women's right to choice—and had submitted herself unto her husband, just the way St. Paul said she should. It didn't work because so many families, even in those sacred middle-class suburbs, have moved out of Norman Rockwell country and won't look back. When Barbara Bush righteously denied everything—her husband's mistress, her children's crookedness—

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instead of being admired for her saintliness, she was reproved for living a lie. Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, won admiration for *not* lying, for confirming the rumors, openly expressing her disgust with her husband, but saying she still loved the guy and hoped they could work it through. The Clintons, with two incomes and two careers, an unsubmissive wife, an overachieving husband who comes not only from the wrong side of the tracks but from an abusive, "dysfunctional" family and a past that still haunts him, and a large complex of serious troubles worn openly on their sleeves, turned out to be close to millions of contemporary families' hearts. The most salient of "family values" in 1992 may be honesty in confronting a family's real troubles. (Will the Clintons add a family therapist to the White House staff?)

So what can President Clinton do for real families? The Western European countries that Clinton has shown he knows about suggest some simple basic services that families need: family allowances, day-care centers, public schools that aren't crumbling, after-school and summer programs for children, community health services, including preventative medicine, birth control and abortion, prenatal care, family counseling, psychiatric help before (rather than after) things fall apart. All these services exist differentially around the country today, but they are dependent on private incomes or local budgets, which means they get slashed just when and where they are needed most. The crucial point is that our federal government has to pay for them out of tax money, and has to make them available to all Americans as basic rights. If Clinton's slogan, "Invest in the American people," means anything, it means this: not only to serve and help the children, but to reduce the crushing anxiety level of all the parents who lie awake in the dark and try to make the life forces add up. It can be done, but it is going to cost plenty, and it's time for the Clinton family, which has impressed so many of us with its honesty, to start being honest about this.

I know my picture of family life today leaves out a deep structure of feeling: nostalgic longing for a self-sufficient family of the past, a family that was everything to us, whose love warmed and enveloped us completely. None of us is free from fantasies like this. For people who grew up in the Great Depression, the Joad family formed a prime nostalgic archetype. (And we shouldn't forget the Goldbergs.) Those who grew up with television are likely to find, twenty and thirty years later, the Walton, Ingalls ("Little House on the Prairie"), Nelson and Cleaver families playing endless reruns in our brains, peremptorily loud, impossible to evict or turn off. Maybe, so that the fantasies don't drown us, our inner networks need supplements. For our nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century time slots, we should add a couple of domestic horror shows like *The Case of Dora* and *The Sound and the Fury*. We could enrich our inner 1950s with a program note—maybe from Stephanie Coontz's recent study, *The Way We Never Were* (Basic Books, 1992)—to say how the GI Bill, FHA housing loans, the federal highway system and the whole vast cold war defense economy created a new suburban middle class "far more dependent on government handouts than any so-called 'underclass' in recent U.S. history." Many children of those garden suburbs, who grew up on those comedies, have found themselves in tragic deserts now that the cold war faucets are being turned off.

I've been disparaging nostalgic fantasies. Yet there is a way in which, regardless of the historical reality, everybody's nostalgic fantasies are right. Unconditional love is the condition we all (or almost all) are in when we're born and in our first few months of life. As grownups, we miss this state of total envelopment, and shouldn't we have the right to? We want to be happy, and nothing makes humans happier than feeling loved. But even if we could have this back somehow, it can't last. From the moment we are born, we are beings who are made to grow. Our parents know we are going to grow, and they want to help us grow: that's part of the way, even in the beginning, the way we're loved. And we are reaching out to grow: even before we know

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anything, reaching out is the way we love. So, if we want to incorporate family values into our lives, our private lives and our collective life, we've got to think of our families as groups of people who are meant to grow.

Actually, Americans know this, even if they don't know they know it. It's why, in 1992, they so decisively rejected "the family" as a symbol of rigidity and regression. Tomorrow's families are going to have a far wider range of forms than yesterday's. They will be, in John Stuart Mill's wonderful phrase, "experiments in living." Plenty of families are experiments in living today: just take a look at the families out shopping with their children any Saturday on Upper Broadway, or check out your favorite mall. Everybody in these families may not be "blood" relations. The parents may not be married. They may be of different races. They may be of the same sex. There will be a lot more stepparents around, and the stepchildren may belong to different generations. The children may spend time shifting homes. They may not understand the relationships among the adults who are taking care of them. (The adults may not understand them either.) But the grownups out there will be giving *alles fur die kindelech*, and the children of the future will be getting a lot of love. □

Andrew Lichtensten/IMPACT VISUALS

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Herbert Kohl

IN DEFENSE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Can It Be Saved?

Over the past twelve years public education has come under an attack that is unique in our national history. For two hundred years there have been many criticisms of public schools, ranging from fundamentalist "back-to-basics" movements to the calls for updating and remaking the curriculum after Sputnik so that we could "keep up with the Russians." Progressive movements, beginning as early as the 1830s and gaining great influence over the public schools in the first years of the twentieth century and during the Great Depression of the 1930s, called for schools to take leadership in remaking society in an egalitarian and sometimes a socialist mode. The progressives in turn, were criticized by many Marxist educators who felt that public schools necessarily reproduced class relations in capitalist society and were therefore dubious candidates for its transformation.

In the late forties and early fifties a wave of patriotism led to calls for introducing "Americanism" into the public-school curriculum. In the sixties public schools were to be the vehicles of racial integration, and during the seventies there was a movement to have them become models of gender equity as well.

All of these attempts to remake public education, whether from the left or right, from the unions or the corporate sector, with the major exception of many Marxist critics, had a common premise: that public education as an enterprise was one of the centerpieces of democracy and as such was indispensable. This implied that all children deserved excellent education and should have opportunities to become whatever they dreamed of being. But that is no longer the case. Since the Reagan era, public schools have been increasingly treated as both a public financial burden and a potentially large market for private profit. Chris Whittle's avowed intent to build a thousand private schools to compete with the public sector, the corporate leasing of several Baltimore public schools to a Minneapolis corporation, and such diverse programs as Bush's Education 2000 program and the corporate-funded New American Schools Development Corporation created to administer it, and the contractual arrangement between the Chelsea, Mass., public schools and Boston University—all threaten publicly controlled free education. Parallel to these efforts is a nationwide thrust for vouchers, which represent, finally, a redistribution of public education funding into the private sector. This voucher movement, well financed and supported by conservative think tanks and previously by the Bush administration, draws upon all segments of the population—from home schoolers, poor people whose children are being badly served by existing public schools, scared middle-class parents who feel their children are not being given competitive skills in the public schools, as well as private and parochial schools that advocate government funding of their work. The National Catholic Educational Association, for example, just commissioned a Gallup poll on school choice, and the results, released in September 1992, indicated 70 percent support for a publicly funded voucher system so that parents could send their children to public, private, or parochial schools of their choice.

All of this represents an abandonment of a

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common commitment to all the children in our society. Vouchers would provide only a small part of private and parochial school tuition and would draw money away from underfunded public schools. Those who could afford private schools in the first place would be subsidized while the poor would find their children in what would become residue schools for disposable children. Corporate schools such as Whittle's and the Education 2000 schools, which would control admissions, standards, and hiring, would signify a direct assault on teachers unions and be free to neglect the children with the greatest educational needs. As Linda Draling-Hammond, professor of education at Teacher's College, Columbia University, has said,*

> . . . those who are proposing private school choice are frequently the same people who have been opposing equal funding to schools for the past 20 years.
>
> The real equity issue is that there are radically unequal allocations of funds to schools. The unequal allocations routinely disadvantage schools in central cities and in poor rural areas. Private school choice . . . is a smokescreen to avoid tackling this real equity issue.

Corporate arrangements such as those in Chelsea and Baltimore are no less cynical. They eliminate community participation, are union busting, and have no obligation to serve all of the children equally. Taken together, these assaults on public education stand to divide our children into those chosen for a superior education and those left to fend for themselves in schools that would make the ones described by Jonathan Kozol in *Savage Inequalities* seem like havens of decency and light.

Voices in support of free and excellent public education for all the children in our society must be mobilized if we are to remain a democratic society. However, it is very difficult to mobilize such support. Public education is defensible, but the current state of the public schools is not. Over the past thirty years I've been working in public education—sometimes within school systems, sometimes on the margins, and even at times in opposition to those systems. In every case I have been in what can only be described as the belly of the beast. There has been a massive failure of public schools to educate poor children and children of color. Most public schools are boring lifeless places that serve a few students well, push most through, and get rid of challenging students who become identified as "problems."

My involvement has been centered on the attempt to create contexts for learning that provide the hope, skills, and knowledge necessary for all children to live decent and rewarding lives. I began teaching fifth grade in the New York City public schools in 1961. That same year I was involved in a teachers strike that closed the system down. The strike was as much for working conditions as for salary increases, and my local, at least, considered that negotiating over conditions of teaching, supplies, control over curriculum, and self-accountability was as important as salary increases. The strike was won, union dues checkoff was approved, and the membership of the United Federation of Teachers went from 5,000 to about 35,000 in a day. But along with the increase in membership went abandonment of teaching issues as union issues. Money and benefits were the obsession of the leadership, which had become, and remains, more politically conservative and concerned almost exclusively with its maintenance of power rather than the quality and nature of the work performed by teachers.

In 1966 I worked for the IS 210 planning board and crossed union picket lines in support of community control of schools that I saw as racist and failing the children they were created to serve. In California, from 1968 to 1971 I was a teacher and principal of a public alternative school that functioned under a contract with the district. Our students received Berkeley High School diplomas. The arrangement was irregular, but was created with the cooperation of the school board because it was

* In *False Choices*, a special issue of the journal *Rethinking Schools* devoted to the issue of vouchers and school choice (available at $3 per copy from Rethinking Schools, 1001 East Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212).

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publicly acknowledged that the high school was not serving all of its students.

Many other public school educators have been involved in the development of alternative schools, open schools, schools-within-schools, community-based learning, and the creation of new schools with distinct, democratically oriented structures and curricula. In addition, public school teachers have developed curricula on their own. Practicing teachers have led in the development of feminist, antiracist, and multicultural curricula, as well as in the development of creative approaches to reading, mathematics, and other subjects. From *No More Teachers Dirty Looks, This Magazine is About Schools, Teacher Paper*, and *Through the Net* in the late 1960s and early 1970s to *Rethinking Schools, Democracy and Education, Our Schools/Our Selves*, and *Changing Schools* today, teachers have created journals for each other and for the communities they serve. These publications speak about teachers' experiences in the classroom, but also about larger educational issues, and explicitly advocate equity, cultural diversity, democracy, and creativity.

Through freedom schools, boycotts, and at times union activities, voices advocating decency and equity in education have constantly insisted upon public education as a necessary component of a hopeful and democratic society. It is probably true that all of these efforts have reached no more than 10 percent of the public schools, most of which have yielded to bureaucratic subversion, fatigue, conservative attack, and administrative and collegial hostility. The central point, however, is that there has been and is, within public education, a continuing force for improvement of free education, equity, and empowerment for all children. This tradition of struggle within public education represents a commitment to the widest possible access to learning. Good teaching and effective learning are based on the belief that every child, as a right, should be provided with the fullest opportunity to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. This implies that time must be taken to know each child, programs must be adapted to each child's style of learning. The teacher must believe that each child has an unknown but great potential, and that none of life's options is to be excluded through tracking or other forms of educational stigma. Teaching well involves patience, the refusal to accept failure, and the ability to maximize children's strengths. Its goal, perhaps unrealizable, is to overcome poverty, eradicate inequity, and at the same time hold everyone up to a high standard of intelligence, sensitivity, and excellence. Thinking as a teacher means refusing to accept a marginalized life for any child. And it means embracing all children, in their wonderful diversity, and teaching from their strengths nurtured by our knowledge and resources.

Yet to defend public education in a way that is convincing to the public is not easy, given the obvious failure of so many of the public schools. Words will simply not be enough. Teachers, principals, and administrators, as well as their unions, will have to take major risks and speak directly to the public and the media about the value and potential quality of public education. Public schools that work must become visible, and those that fail must be scrutinized and changed. Educators have to become self-critical and straighten out their own schools before any convincing defense of public schools can be made. No theoretical defense of public education in the name of democracy will be convincing unless a defense can also be made of public schools.

There are a number of specific things we can do in defense of public schools. Here are five of them:

1. *Public schools or programs that work must be identified and made visible.* Educators must articulate what they consider to be good practice and show how they can be effective with all children. This is really a problem when you are part of a system that has produced so much failure. Nevertheless there is much good public educational practice, and books such as *Embracing Diversity*, edited by Laurie Olsen (California Tomorrow), *The Good Common School: Making the Vision Work for All Children* (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, Boston, Mass.), and George Wood's *Schools that Work: America's Most Innovative*

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Public Education Programs (Dutton, 1992) show how public education can succeed.

The resources of teachers' unions and other organizations should be used to reach out to a wider public with visions of public schools that work. Right now, these organizations are too insular and do not relate to the communities they are supposed to serve or speak in ordinary language to parents and concerned citizens about quality public schooling. The reason may be that quality schools may embarrass schools that are failing; but it is time to admit failure in public education and do something about it. If educators can't hold each other accountable for the quality of their work, there will be no work for them to do.

2. *All categories of educational stigma must be re-examined and eliminated.* Stigmatizing students because of teachers' inability to educate is a common strategy in the public schools and is perhaps one of the central causes of community resentment. This is also reinforced by the media. For example, Chris Sajac, the teacher in Tracy Kidder's book *Among Schoolchildren*, is given pats on the back for feeling bad about referring one of her students to special education since she knows that it is equivalent to an educational death sentence.

Funding programs based on the continued existence of students who fail is another. In the early 1970s I was asked to help a group of Chicano college students in southern California set up a reading and writing program in a local public school. The school district had agreed to enter into a partnership with the college, and several third- and fourth-grade classes were chosen for the experiment. Almost all of the children in the classes were designated Title IV children—that is, they were poor, predominantly minority students who were functioning below grade level and therefore qualified for extra federal funding under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964.

After a year of hard work the program began to bear fruit. One by one, and then in small groups, the students began to perform on grade level until a critical mass of about two-thirds of the students involved were on or above grade level. At that point some of the college students called and asked me to return to southern California to help plan the next step, which was to expand their program up to the fifth and sixth, and down to the first and second grades.

A few days before my visit I received another call telling me that the program had been destroyed. It turned out that because the program had succeeded in getting a number of third and fourth graders up to grade level, those students no longer qualified for Title IV money. The district's Title IV budget was cut, and there was no more financial support for the program. And the school district administration was angry at the students and the college for messing up its supplemental funding. One of the district administrators even told a public meeting that the district had to increase the number of its Title IV qualified students in order to maintain its programs. Less than one academic year later the school had reconstituted enough failure to get its full Title IV funding again.

Title IV programs, and other programs that tie money to student failure, have no mechanism for dealing with success. Programs that depend upon financial support predicated on the existence of failure or pathology have to maintain the condition they are designed to eliminate in order to survive. Consider the case of the so-called "educationally handicapped" (EH). EH children are identified by teachers as needing special treatment. Most of them have problems reading, writing, or doing math, but there are a substantial number of children designated EH simply because they do not like to sit still or stay quiet when they work or because their teachers feel uncomfortable with them.

Stigmatizing children as a cover for educational incompetence is not limited to the children of the poor. Recently a new category of stigma has been constructed: Attention Deficit Disorder. Students designated as ADD often refuse to listen quietly and without response when a teacher or another person in authority is talking, resist following instructions blindly, and refuse to do boring worksheets and other assignments if they already know the material. Interestingly enough, these conditions are positive qualifications for future participatory citizenship. An argument can be

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made that ADD is one way that public school authorities are suppressing the spirit of democracy.

Some of the symptoms of ADD are fidgeting, getting out of one's seat without permission, and doodling instead of doing boring assignments. The primary victims of this syndrome are middle-class children who can perform academically but refuse to when they are not challenged. The category was invented as an extension of the idea that educators do not need to examine their practice and change it when it fails. Instead, the strategy is to spread stigma throughout the student population and blame the victims of pedagogical incompetence.

Gerald Coles, a neurologist, establishes in his well-documented book on the EH phenomena, *The Learning Mystique*, that there is no physiological or medical condition that EH children share. His remarks hold true for ADD as well. According to Coles, EH is not a condition of brain pathology. There is no proof that there is anything wrong with the mental functioning of EH children. There is no common underlying pathology. Instead of adjusting the classroom to fit these children's styles of learning or changing the curriculum, schools invest the children with pathology and treat them as deficient.

Once designated EH, children are removed from the classroom for the whole or part of the day; some of them are drugged with Ritalin; most of them are subjected to simplified versions of the learning material that they had already failed to master in their original classrooms. The classes they are sent to are smaller than regular classes and funded through laws and regulations providing for special education. The teachers are EH specialists, which means that they have taken special classes in the education of the EH child and have certificates or even master's degrees in the field. However, the substance of what is taught in classes on the education of the EH child is not much different from what is taught in ordinary teacher education classes.

Thus the EH child is surrounded by an entire social system entailing laws, regulations, funding, college classes, degrees, and certification. The inability of regular classrooms to educate all children (and in particular minority, working-class and poor children) has led to the construction of a profession that depends upon the existence of children who are pushed out of "normal" classrooms and made pathological. Once an EH program is rooted in a school, staffed by certified EH teachers, funded by EH laws, using ordinary educational materials specially labeled as appropriate for EH children, the children have to be found. There is no mechanism for the elimination of EH programs if they happen to be successful. Nor is there a mechanism for the elimination of dysfunctional professions. Yet degrees in the education of the handicapped are no more than artifices dependent upon suspect stigmatization of children.

Not surprisingly, the existence of the EH subsystem has not led to a wide-scale increase in the levels of performance of EH children. In fact, once the idea is established that school failure is always the fault of the child and that one can get away with blaming the victims of failed practice, the way is open for the constant creation of new categories of pathological behavior as well as for a proliferation of new professions. And when school failure reaches massive proportions, the climate is created for going beyond individual systems of pathology to the development of categories of social stigmatization that turn societal prejudices into pseudoscientific systems of behavior control. We are, unfortunately, now at that point. The category of "at risk," though applied to individual children, is actually a form of social stigmatization that is at times difficult to distinguish from racism.

I have not been able to find a clear and unambiguous definition of what is meant by "at-risk behavior." The closest I've come appears in a book published in the National Education Association's Professional Library Series, *At-Risk, Low-Achieving Students in the Classroom*, by Judy Brown Lehr and Hazel Wiggins Harris. The authors admit at the very beginning that a "review of the literature does not indicate a published definition of the

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at-risk, low-achieving student." Then they go on to give a list of possible labels without bothering to question whether accepting the concept without a definition is intellectually responsible. In fact, the whole book proceeds on the assumption that, definition or not, the category is useful. Here are some of the labels they come up with:

> disadvantaged, culturally deprived, underachiever, non achiever, low ability, slow learner, less able, low socioeconomic status, language-impaired, drop-out-prone, alienated, marginal, disenfranchised, impoverished, underprivileged, low-performing and remedial.

The authors then go on to list characteristics that can be used to identify students as at risk (not all of which need be present, they tell us, in order to identify a student as at risk):

> academic difficulties, lack of structure (disorganized), inattentiveness, distractibility, short attention span, low self-esteem, health problems, excessive absenteeism, dependence, discipline problem, narrow range of interest, lack of social skills, inability to face pressure, fear of failure (feels threatened by learning), and lack of motivation.

To identify children as "at risk" is to pick them out for special treatment *not for what they have done but for what they might do*. A child who is merely doing poorly in school is not necessarily "at risk." Nor is a child who has any of the above characteristics. So what makes a child at risk, what is the hidden agenda of the people who have manufactured the at risk category? What are such children at risk of doing?

In plain language, at-risk children are at risk of turning the poverty and racism they experience against the society rather than learning how to conform and take their proper place. One strong way for educators to defend public education is to repudiate all categories like this and assume responsibility for changing their practice until it works for children they have previously been unable to serve. If not, the voucher option, the private or parochial school, or corporate learning center is bound to be more attractive than public schools of stigma.

3. *Advocate genuine educational choice within the public schools.* Allow teachers, parents, and other groups of educators to create small schools within the context of large public school systems and give them freedom and resources. Evaluate them, for sure, but on criteria that parents and teachers agree upon, not those mandated by a central authority that might be irrelevant to their practice and goals.

It is easy to create bogus choice systems in public schools. The first experiment with choice and vouchers within a public school system that I heard about took place in the Alum Rock School District in San Jose, California in the early 1970s. The district, which served many children of color and was experiencing major failure, was to be a model of school choice. Parents would be given vouchers covering the cost of their children's education that could be redeemed at any school in the district that they chose. The experiment fell apart in less than three years for the following reasons:

- the few decent schools were immediately oversubscribed and the communities they served didn't want to give up any places to outsiders,
- the worst schools stayed just as they were and became residue schools, where students who couldn't get into the schools of their choice were assigned,
- no training materials were provided, nor were physically depressing sites rebuilt,
- the teachers, community groups, and parents who wanted to create innovative schools were denied access to funds or facilities, and
- a combination of teacher organizations and administrators made sure that no person or school, no matter how dismal, was evaluated or forced to change or declare itself out of business.

Public school choice in Alum Rock, and in many other districts I have observed over the years, became, for the majority of underserved people, no choice at all. Business as usual was restored to the district—meaning failure without accountability.

Public schools must open themselves up to

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the uncomfortable fact that many children have been failed by their efforts, and new blood and new life must enter the process if public education is not to be undone by private choice.

4. *Go on the offensive and let parents know that the corporate agenda for their children is cynical and undemocratic.* The current rhetoric pushing schools to prepare students for the work world is a sham. Corporations cannot possibly employ hundreds of thousands of well-qualified technical and professional workers who command high salaries and still squeeze out the profits their stockholders demand. The corporations want to train a small elite of middle-level workers; they take no responsibility for the rest of the people. This was dramatically illustrated to me last year when I was asked to make a presentation at a meeting of business people and educators who were restructuring schools in a large southern city. The theme of the meeting was "Education and Vocation for the 21st Century." My presentation was preceded by a luncheon, and I was seated with the CEO of a sponsoring corporation. We hit it off immediately and shared personal experiences, stories about our children's struggles in their schooling, and ideas for new schools that would provide young people with creative and critical skills. I was amazed at the convergence of our views and asked him what would happen if, through restructuring, most of the students developed technological and critical thinking skills. I wondered aloud if these young people would become fully employed and have decent salaries and challenging work.

I sensed some distress as he composed an answer. Yes, some of the youngsters would get good jobs, but even his corporation, which was committed to the development of the community, had a limited number of new jobs and was reducing staff. In addition, there was no guarantee that the company, which was part of a multinational corporation, would remain in the state. Education and economics were not in sync, and the ability of students to benefit from educational reform was dependent upon conditions that had nothing to do with what happened in schools. Painfully, he admitted that finding jobs for all well-qualified people was simply was not his or his corporation's responsibility.

Corporate education partnerships also pretend to encourage critical thinking. But in the current anti-union and anti-worker climate, putting education in the hands of the corporations is a form of workercide.

5. *Parents should become more knowledgeable about public education.* Work to make what happens in your children's school transparent so that stigma is exposed, incompetence revealed, and excellence discovered. Create progressive, multiracial, and cross-class coalitions with other parent groups, caring teachers, and principals to change schools. Run people for the school board, and make it known to school bureaucrats, from the superintendent down, that they are accountable for their performance and that blaming your children for their failure is simply not acceptable if they are to receive public funds. Fight the stigmatization of children—refuse it as a substitute for adequate funding, caring teachers, and good pedagogy. Scrutinize school budgets—and rewrite them from the bottom up—from the perspective of services provided directly to students and the community, not from the perspective of supporting a central Board of Education and the services it mandates.

There are two national groups that provide support and information for coalitions committed to progressive school change. One is the National Coalition of Education Activists (P.O. Box 405, Rosedale, N.Y. 12472). The other is the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (100 Boylston St., Suite 737, Boston, MA 02116-4610), which has twenty-two member organizations. Each will send free information.

Finally, in defense of public education, we need to reaffirm that we care about other people's children, about *all* of the children born in our society. I hope that people will begin to speak more intelligently and courageously about ideas like freedom and democracy, reaffirming the essential role of public education. □

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David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz

RACE AND FOSTER CARE

The headlines of the nation's newspapers, from New York to Washington to Los Angeles, blare out the same message: "D.C. Foster Care Workers Tell of Horrors," "Foster Care System Reeling," "Troubled Children Flood Ill-Prepared Foster Care System." The nation's foster-care system has been flooded with thousands of "emotionally traumatized children" who are "products of families ruined by crack, AIDS and homelessness." Foster-care agencies, using photographs and advertisements, reinforce the public's perception that their agencies are valiantly trying to address the needs of minority children abandoned by their families and communities.

It is undoubtedly true that twelve years of Reagan and Bush child-care and social service policies have exacerbated the problems faced by many minority families. But the history of the foster-care system in America's large cities suggests that the dominant foster-care agencies themselves, along with local government, deserve a great deal of the blame for the current suffering of America's dependent minority children.

New York City's foster-care system provides a window to view the evolution of this tragedy. In 1973 the New York Civil Liberties Union initiated the historic *Wilder v. Sugarman* lawsuit on behalf of ten thousand African-American children to force sectarian foster care agencies and the city to abandon practices that resulted in the denial of services to African-American and Latino children. The suit, soon assumed by the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), charged that the city conspired with the voluntary foster care agencies to create "a dual child-care system that separates children on the basis of race and religion" and that this had led to "cruel and brutalizing" treatment of minority children. We suggest that today's foster-care crisis has its origins in a legally sanctioned segregated social service system that developed in New York City and elsewhere in the first half of this century. Even after special legislation outlawed legalized segregation during World War II, custom, tradition, and religion perpetuated a two-track system based on race and religion, the legacies of which we live with today.

The origins of New York's foster-care system lay in the historic relationship between religious charitable institutions and the political leadership of the city. In the mid-nineteenth century, Protestant and some Catholic charities were funded by the city to provide services for poor and dependent children. By the Great Depression, Jewish and Catholic agencies grew in importance as Eastern and Southern European Catholics and Jews made up a greater proportion of the city's poor. By law as well as custom, children who came before the city's Children's, Family, or Domestic Relations Court were placed in agencies according to their religious affiliation. There were no public services for dependent children except for those convicted of crimes, who could be sent to prisons or reformatories.

The sectarians' domination of the foster-care system perpetuated the racial segregation of the city's dependent children. Through World War II, most of the children referred to the sectarian agencies were ethnic whites who were dispersed among the variety of orphanages, foster homes, or child-guidance clinics affiliated with the Jewish Board of Guardians, Catholic Charities, and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. For the relatively small

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percentage of African-American children who were referred for placement, the choice was much narrower. Jewish and Catholic agencies were not required even to consider these predominantly Protestant African-American children, and the white Protestant agencies either excluded African Americans completely or had extremely limited quotas and relegated the chosen few to segregated eating and living accommodations. A scattering of institutions such as the Colored Orphan Asylum in Manhattan and the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum in Brooklyn were reserved for minority children, and these were perpetually overcrowded. One investigation concluded that in January, 1940, "12 out of 16 Protestant institutional programs accepted no Negro children and . . . three of [the remaining] four institutions were for Negro children only."[1]

In the last years of the Great Depression, Fiorello LaGuardia appointed three justices to the Domestic Relations Court, all of whom would focus their energies on the injustices of the prevailing system. Jane Bolin, the first African American to graduate from Yale Law School and the first black woman judge in the country; Hubert Delany, an African-American graduate of CCNY (City College of New York) and New York University Law School; and Justine Wise Polier, a Radcliffe and Yale-educated lawyer and daughter of Reform Rabbi Stephen Wise and child-care reformer Louise Wise, began a campaign to remedy the growing crisis for minority children.

The justices were particularly outraged by the impact of the existing segregated system on their own judicial decisions: the lack of placements forced them to send neglected African-American youth to the state-run reformatories or prison system. Polier recalled the case of a ten-year-old child who had a history of running away from home and surviving on pilfered food from local markets. The probation officer told her that "there is nothing to do [for this child], your Honor, until he is 12 or commits a felony [after which] he can be sent to the State Training School."[2]

Until the 1930s, the African-American population of the city was relatively small and the percentage of African-American children appearing before the Children's Court for placement in foster care was a mere 3 to 5 percent. But as the African-American migration from the South accelerated during the depression and World War II, the inequities of the system of foster care took on a tragic appearance. In 1942, Justices Bolin, Delany, and Polier joined with some reform leaders and pressed the New York City Council to pass the Race Discrimination Amendment to the city's charitable institutions' budget. It required the city to deny funds to any institution that discriminated according to race. It still allowed agencies to choose their clients according to religion and thus virtually exempted the Jewish and Catholic agencies from its provisions. (Many Catholic agencies escaped the law by establishing segregated services within the same agency.) The Protestant agencies were thrown into turmoil as some openly rejected the law, preferring to refuse services to all children referred to them by the city rather than integrate. Others agreed to abide by the law, but several years later had still not accepted a single African-American child. In the first year following the passage of this law, the number of placements of Protestant African-American children actually declined from 242 to 171.[3] Similar efforts to legislate change within the foster agencies in 1952 met with new forms of resistance.

Faced with the intransigence of the sectarian agencies, some called for public facilities to handle public wards. In 1947, the city took over the former home of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and established the Children's Center for the temporary care of the African-American children who were victims of the delaying tactics and withdrawal of service by the sectarian agencies. But the major political thrust was to try to entice the religious agencies to serve African-American children. It was not until the 1960s that reformers despaired of forcing the sectarian agencies to provide adequate facilities and programs for the growing number of African-American children then migrating to the City. At that point, with the active opposition of the

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sectarian agencies, New York established a small number of facilities to provide long-term care for children rejected by the voluntary services. It should come as no surprise that these were virtually all-black facilities.

During the 1950s and 1960s a new form of segregation emerged, with the vast majority of white children in the voluntary agencies and the vast majority of African-American dependent youth in public institutions like Spofford and a series of "training schools" for boys and girls in Warwick and Hudson. Some children awaiting possible placement in the sectarian agencies languished in prison, as sectarian agencies engaged in long preplacement screening and selection processes. Another set of ostensibly "non-sectarian" facilities, publicly funded and staffed but run by boards drawn from among the leadership of New York's philanthropic community, also evolved as essentially segregated all-black and Hispanic institutions. Wiltwyck, for example, was backed by Justine Wise Polier and Eleanor Roosevelt, because of the unwillingness of the sectarian agencies to honestly address their own racist policies. Other ostensibly "voluntary" agencies were also publicly funded and staffed but were controlled by the leadership of the sectarian agencies and used to offset criticism of the voluntary agencies.

By the early 1970s, despite the impact of the civil rights and "Black Power" movements and New York's image as a progressive, liberal, enlightened community, the resistance of the sectarian agencies to integration had led to a two-track system of services: Jewish and Catholic children were assured services through the dominant voluntary agencies. African-American children, however, encountered numerous roadblocks to effective care at every important turn. Although more African-American children were accepted by the Jewish and Catholic agencies, most were warehoused in public institutions some of which had developed as part of the corrections system. The public services provided through city institutions were understaffed and of low quality to begin with. But, their problems were accentuated by the special relationship between the city and sectarian leaders, as only "select" African-American children were allowed into the voluntary system. Those religious agencies that accepted African-American children did so only when these children met their own particular needs or interests. Light-skinned African-American children were selected over darker skinned children, high-achieving children over children with lower I.Q.s, and well-mannered children over those with behavioral problems. Almost always, the sectarian agencies wanted to know the race of children referred to them by social workers or the courts before accepting them for placement. The Joint Planning Service, a referral unit for the Jewish agencies, "always" asked about race as well as religion for children referred for both long- and short-term placements.[4]

A particularly horrifying example of the importance of race in the selection process of children for long-term placement in foster homes and adoption was the case of New York Foundling Hospital, which, as late as 1974, would send foundlings of indeterminate race to the Museum of Natural History, where an anthropologist would inspect skull size, skin tone, facial, and other characteristics to determine the race of abandoned infants. As the administrator of New York Foundling Hospital reported in 1976, "color determination" was a central concern of the hospital: "Very often we had children who had been abandoned children where we didn't have any information on the parent; and it would be necessary to have some kind of [racial] determination before placing the child."[5]

By the early 1970s, the two-track system had left the public agencies in disarray. Behaviorally disturbed children, often with mental deficiencies, overwhelmed the underfunded and understaffed public facilities. Shelters for temporary placements of sixty to ninety days before children were "returned to the community," either through adoption or foster placement, became warehouses in which some children were kept as long as three to four years.

Even within the sectarian sector, however, African-American children encountered the

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intransigence of a system that had developed around race and racism. Despite the fact the selection of children guaranteed that the few African-American children were higher-functioning, younger, and less disturbed than the majority of white children at these agencies, white children were still placed for adoption more frequently and more quickly than their African-American counterparts.

A number of arguments have been used to justify the selective and highly discriminatory practices of sectarian agencies. Among them is that their religious orientation and financial links to the ethnic and religious communities of the city make it understandable that they would respond to the needs of their own religious and ethnic populations first. Undergirding this argument is the assumption that the Jewish and Catholic communities provide the financial base of these agencies. In fact, for all of this century, public tax dollars have supported the bulk of services provided by these agencies, and, by the 1970s, more than 90 percent of their budgets came from federal, state, and local taxes.

The justification for this public funding is that sectarian agencies provide a service that is comprehensive and more effective than any possible public system. The result of this, however, is that these agencies are public in all but name, yet they are not fully accountable to the public in that they have obviously not met the needs of large numbers of those children. Justine Wise Polier, who in the late 1960s was instrumental in spurring the New York Civil Liberties Union to bring forth the *Wilder* case, went to Kenneth Clark to discuss a matter that "had been . . . almost a personal crusade." Her concern was "the disparate treatment of minority group children in need of care" which was due, in her opinion, "to the claims of voluntary agencies that they may define and effect their responsibilities for such care as they wish, without any effective accountability" to the public.[6]

Another argument for the discriminatory system is that to change it is to tamper with the successes that some of the sectarian agencies have had in providing decent foster care for at least some of the city's children. These rationalizations are reminiscent of southern segregationists who argued in the 1950s and 1960s that integration would lead to inferior education for whites and blacks. It is telling that today, a half-century after Justice Wise Polier first observed the hypocrisies of a system based on race, the same arguments are used to defend the voluntary system of social services.

The *Wilder* case arose in the context of the disorder and racial divisions that characterized the early 1970s foster-care system. It dragged on through the courts until 1984, when the ACLU won a victory and the city "agreed to place children with foster care agencies on a first-come, first-served basis, regardless of race or religion." But the legal victory of the ACLU did not resolve the continuing role of race in shaping the foster care system. Although the *Wilder* decision mandated greater public oversight over referral procedures of the sectarian agencies, public officials did not use their newfound power to truly reverse and reform the system. More important, new and perhaps more insidious methods for avoiding the court order to refrain from maintaining segregated services appear to be evolving within the nonprofit agencies. We have witnessed a suburbanization not only of ethnic whites but also of the agencies that once served them in the central cities. Further, these same agencies have increasingly redefined their programs in order to avoid the narrow requirements of the *Wilder* decision as it affects foster care. Agencies that once depended on funds earmarked for foster care now draw funds from state and federal grants reserved to serve the mentally ill, developmentally disabled, handicapped, and mentally retarded.

In 1990, the ACLU was forced to return to court when it became apparent that the city was not living up to the settlement. Rather, the new form of discrimination was based on an informal system of distributing children to the foster care agencies according to "gradations of skin color and hair texture."[7] As Marcia Lowry, the ACLU lawyer who has guided the case since its inception, recently told us, "After all the effort of the past two decades, it is frustrating to see how difficult it continues to

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be to find quality services for Black kids in need."

Today we have lurid stories of the breakdown of the foster care system and sensational exposés of troubled African-American youth, but no attention is paid to the ways that race and racism have shaped the institutions of the city and the lives of these children. The racism of the foster-care system certainly is not the only cause for the social breakdown that has destroyed the lives of many African-American youth. Nor is it the only cause of the growing racial antagonism that affects the quality of life in major American cities. Yet, abandonment of African Americans in the postwar years by major institutions points to a much broader responsibility than is often acknowledged. □

Notes

[1] "The Placement of Negro Children by Protestant Child-Caring Agencies, 1940–1951," Jan. 8, 1952, Justine Wise Polier Mss. Carton 2, Folder: "Discrimination and Segregation: Racial and Religious, 1936–44," Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

[2] Justine Wise Polier, "History of Wiltwyck School," typescript, Justine Wise Polier Mss. Carton 3, Folder: "Wiltwyck-History," Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

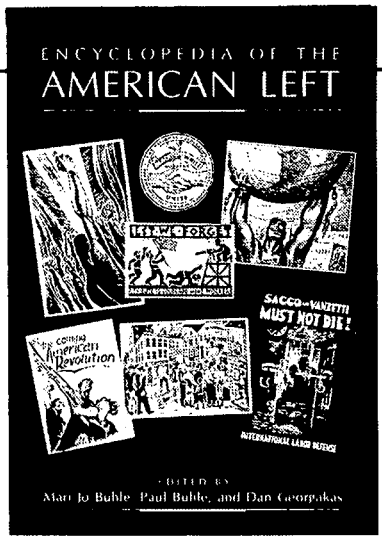
[3] H.W. Marsh, Commissioner of Welfare, to Edwin J. Lukas, May 23, 1945, Polier Mss. Carton 2, Folder: "Racial Discrimination, 1938–49."

[4] Plaintiffs' Exhibit 241, Deposition of Marie Laufer, Nov. 21, 1973, p. 19, 1.2; p. 20, 1.18, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, Wilder v. Sugarman.

[5] Plaintiff's Exhibit 254, Deposition of the New York Foundling Hospital by Sister Marian Cecilia Schneider, July 8, 1976, p. 33, United States District Court, Southern District of New York, Wilder v. Sugarman.

[6] "Project Plan Paper for MARC Staff Study and Recommendations on 'The Disposition of Minority Group Children in Need of Placement and/or Services by Public and Private Agencies in New York City,' " in Kenneth Clark Mss. Box 20, unprocessed papers, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, Washington, D.C.

[7] "Foster Placement by Skin Shade is Charged," *New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1990, B1.



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Maurice Isserman

CLOSING THE FILE ON ERLICH & ALTER

Fifty years ago this winter, the Soviet government announced that a crime had been committed. The circumstances of the crime were misstated. The date of the crime was misreported. The victims of the crime were described as if they were the criminals. It's now possible, and long past time, to set the record straight.

In February 1943, the Soviet government announced the execution of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Before the war the two men had been internationally respected leaders of the General Jewish Workers Union, better known as "the Bund," the socialist labor movement based in Poland. That did not save them, when they fell into Soviet hands, from ludicrous charges of being agents of, variously, the Polish secret police, the "international bourgeoisie," and (after the collapse of the Hitler-Stalin Pact), the Nazis. In 1991 the Russian chief prosecutor declared Erlich and Alter were, in reality, innocent of all the charges brought against them. Around the same time the KGB released five volumes of files on the Erlich-Alter case. Since then Erlich's niece, Viktorya Dubnova (granddaughter of the distinguished Russian-Jewish historian Simon Dubnow), has spent many months copying the files in a room set aside for that purpose in the KGB building in Moscow near Kuznetsky Bridge #22. No xeroxing is available, so every file has had to be copied by hand. Henryk's son Victor, who made his way be a circuitous route to the United States in 1942, and who is today Professor Emeritus of Russian literature at Yale University, has been translating Dubnova's transcriptions. The files provide a final, moving testament to the courageous dignity of two veteran revolutionaries in the last months of their lives.

Neither Erlich nor Alter was a stranger to the inside of a jail cell when they were picked up by the NKVD (predecessor to the KGB). As a leader of the Bund in Poland and prerevolutionary Russia, and as its representative to the Central Committee of the Menshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic party, Erlich had been arrested four times by the czarist police. Alter had suffered his first arrest for underground political activities at the age of fifteen. When the czar was overthrown in the revolution of 1917, Erlich was elected one of the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet and brought a resolution before the Soviet calling for the establishment of an independent Polish state. When the Bolsheviks came to power in November 1917, Erlich and Alter left for Poland, where they led the Bund for the next two decades.

Although outspoken opponents of the Bolshevik regime's suppression of democratic rights, in the 1930s, Erlich and Alter advocated cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies in a collective defense against fascism. When the Nazis invaded western Poland in 1939, the bundist leaders fled eastward. When the Red Army occupied eastern Poland, Erlich and Alter were immediately arrested. Freed briefly in the autumn months of 1941 as Nazi armies approached the gates of Moscow, Erlich and Alter were re-arrested in December. They were never again seen or heard from by anyone but their jailers. Soviet authorities ignored repeated queries from Western socialist and labor leaders for information about the fate of the two men. Finally, in February 1943, Soviet ambassador to the United States Maxim Litvinov released a brief statement declaring that Erlich and Alter had been shot in December 1942, supposedly for attempting to undermine Soviet resistance to the Nazi invasion. Two months later Litvinov announced that the executions had in fact taken place a year earlier, in December 1941. Both dates, it turns out, were fabrications.

What follows is an excerpt from a letter that Erlich sent on December 27, 1941, to the praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, protesting his arrest. It is the last document he is known to have written:

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I am a Polish citizen, born in 1882. On October 4, 1939 I was arrested in Brest-Litovsk, as a member of the Central Committee of the Bund, and transported to Moscow. On July 28, 1941, along with many other prisoners, I was evacuated to Sazatov jail. On August 2, 1941 the Military Tribunal of the Sazatov region, on the basis of utterly fantastic testimony of persons incarcerated in 1937 and 1938, sentenced me to death. On August 27, 1941 this sentence was commuted to 10 years of forced labor. On September 11, 1941 I was brought back to Moscow and on the next day released from prison. A day later my comrade Victor Alter, who had undergone the same ordeal, was also released. As we were being set free, we were told that we were released not only in consonance with the Soviet-Polish agreement of July 17, 1941, but also because the NKVD had been in error. We were enjoined to forget all that had happened and to engage in a discussion [with the Soviet authorities] on how we could help in the struggle against Nazism.

We accepted the latter suggestion with alacrity. . . . We proposed the formation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee whose main task would be a vigorous campaign among the Jewish communities of the U.S. and England and other countries, urging maximum assistance to the USSR, in its struggle against the Nazi invaders. . . . All this was thoroughly discussed and fully approved, as was the structure of the Committee. I was elected to be its Chairman . . . and Alter [its] Secretary. . . .

On October 15, 1941 we were evacuated, together with the Polish Embassy, to Kuybyshev. Immediately upon arrival we made contact with the local NKVD, and waited impatiently for the opportunity to begin our activities.

On December 3 Alter and I were told over the phone that the representative of the People's Commissariat [of Internal Affairs], who had taken part in our Moscow discussions, had arrived and asked us to drop by. After a 20-hour wait the above mentioned official told us he had been authorized to arrest us; he added that he was not ruling out the possibility of a misunderstanding. . . .

We were separated and placed in the internal prison of the Kuybyshev NKVD, in solitary confinement.

It is hardly necessary to add that after what I had gone through during the last years I was profoundly shocked by this new and totally inexplicable arrest. Nor do I need to dwell on the effect of the news about our arrest upon the Jewish community in the U.S., upon the labor movements in the U.S. and Great Britain, and most notably, the Jewish community and the democratic segment of the Polish population, in Nazi-occupied Poland. . . .

What is happening to us and my comrade is demonstrably illegal. . . . Keeping us for 3½ weeks without either a written or an oral explanation of our arrest is a violation of the principles of the Soviet constitution and of the Soviet code of criminal justice. . . .

One more thing. I am a Polish citizen. I request an opportunity to make contact with my embassy.

Erlich's bold challenge to his jailers went unanswered. In the months that followed he must have lost all expectation of ever regaining his freedom. On May 14, 1942 Erlich took his own life in his jail cell in Kuybyshev prison. For a man who had no other way to protest the injustice of his arrest, Erlich's suicide may well have been intended as a final act of defiance. Alter threatened to do the same. "I am very tired," he declared in a letter to the head of the Kuybyshev NKVD in April 1942. "As you know, a horrible end is better than endless horror." The prison authorities took care to remove pens, belt buckles, and anything else from Alter's cell that could be used as a suicide weapon. When death finally came, it would not be by his own hand. On February 14, 1943, Joseph Stalin personally authorized Ambassador Litvinov to announce to the world that Erlich and Alter had already been executed for their alleged crimes. The bogus report, of course, left a loose end to be tied up. Three days later, the director of the Kuybyshev NKVD prison informed his superiors (in the convoluted syntax and passive voice favored by bureaucrats the world round) that "implementing your oral, personal directive, at 2 a.m., February 17, 1943 the prisoner #41 [Alter], held in the internal prison of the regional NKVD, was shot, which action we are reporting herewith."

Like millions of others who fell as victims to the treachery and inhumanity of the Stalinist system, two good men were killed for crimes they did not commit. At least now it is known when they died and how. In an earlier account of the Erlich-Alter case, which appeared in these pages shortly after the 1981 suppression of the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland (*Dissent*, Spring 1982), I predicted that in a future democratic Poland "the

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names of Solidarity's leaders—and perhaps of Erlich and Alter—will be honored long after those of [Polish Communist leaders] Gomulka, Gierek, and Jaruzelski have been forgotten." Noble sentiments are all too often plastered over forlorn hopes. At the time I wrote those words, to be honest, I expected they would work better as literary device—providing a somewhat upbeat ending to an otherwise bleak account of martyrdom and defeat—than as historical prophecy. And yet today a memorial to Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter stands in the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw. If there are plans afoot in Poland to build statues in memory of Gomulka, Gierek, and Jaruzelski, not to mention Stalin, I haven't heard of them. Although the politics of postcommunist Poland and Russia are not all that one could hope for, there may still be some consolation in knowing that the children of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter outlived the system that killed their fathers. □

Murray Hausknecht

EMBRACING SOCIALISM

Recent history has not been kind to the ideas of "socialism" and "tradition." The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—"the only existing socialism" according to some friends and foes alike—seems to make socialism an obvious candidate for the dustbin of history. The rhetoric of conservative troglodytes—as at last year's Republican Convention—illustrates Max Horkheimer's remark, "Precisely the fact that tradition must be invoked shows that it has lost its power." It is within this historical moment that people on the left, who in the past have defined themselves unhesitatingly as socialists and as part of a "socialist tradition," face the question of whether they are misguided in clinging to that identity and tradition.

Some shrug off the question by saying that our enemies will identify us as socialists in any case, so we might as well accept the label and get on with the important job of determining what it now means to be a socialist. Since this commonsensical approach assumes that the idea of socialism, if not the name, is still valuable, it seems more consistent to start from a more positive premise. Or, to put the matter another way, rather than thinking of a socialist identity as a cross to bear, it is better to consciously embrace it as a starting point for thinking about the future of the socialist idea.

There is, of course, no one socialist tradition that can be identified as *the* socialist tradition. Any tradition, in this instance a set of beliefs and ideas, is handed down through generations. In the process it changes; a tradition at one time in its history is not substantively identical with the tradition at a later time. Change is inevitable, because, if only for survival's sake, people must "make sense" of the natural and social worlds they inhabit. The history of a tradition is a history of interpretation and reinterpretation, a continual selective understanding of the past and present. A tradition that is truly a tradition, rather than a nostalgic or ideological simulacrum, is shaped and reshaped as it is lived, transmitted, and received.

If a tradition is mutable it is not totally so; a tradition contains recognizable elements that persist throughout its existence, and they are markers enabling us to distinguish one tradition from another. Reflecting on socialism as a tradition is, in part, an attempt to preserve those components that can serve us in the present, and to identify oneself as a socialist is to interpret and adapt a socialist tradition to present needs and circumstances.

A clue to some of the elements that distinguish socialism through time are suggested by the sociologist Edward Shils. In his *Tradition* (University of Chicago, 1981) he writes that a tradition "gives form to [a] prior impulse which has potentialities for many forms." A person does not become a socialist because "he has thought it all out for himself." Rather, because the person has "an aversion to poverty" or dislike of the power of private property, "his mind inclines or is disposed in the direction set by experience and sentiment, toward general beliefs acquired from tradition. . . . The person so disposed finds ready to hand a more differentiated picture and a more differentiated plan already in being."

Here Shils touches on an essential experience in the lives of many socialists. That is, our first encounter with socialist thought crystallized vague feelings or sentiments about poverty and inequality that we saw about us. Or, perhaps in other instances, that encounter awoke us to an awareness of problematic aspects of the social world that heretofore we took for granted as being something "natural." By seeing ourselves as socialists and part of a socialist tradition we distanced ourselves, emotionally and intellectually, from some dominant social institutions. To self-consciously maintain a

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socialist identity today is to maintain that distance and critical stance.

At the center of socialist tradition is a profound detestation of the disparities of political and economic power, social inequality, and the miseries of poverty. This almost visceral reaction is reinforced by an understanding that these are "unnatural" evils, they are not inherent in the nature of society as such. More positively, socialism represents a profound belief that people can construct a truly democratic society, a society in which the rights and privileges of citizenship can be extended from the political to the economic order, and one in which poverty will be a thing of the past.

These core ideas can be and have been elaborated and extended in many ways and directions. In one direction the socialist tradition overlaps the tradition of political liberalism, since the commitment to democracy and equality is also a commitment to racial, ethnic, and gender equality as well as religious freedom. It also condemns chauvinism, whether masquerading as patriotism or nationalism, while recognizing the importance of those sentiments to individuals and the society as a whole.

If socialism overlaps political liberalism it departs radically from the liberal tradition in its emphasis on the importance of state power in furthering economic equality and the elimination of poverty. In terms of practice this has meant that socialism has become synonymous with "a planned economy," an idea that is one of the more obvious casualties of recent history. But even before the final disintegration of the command economies many socialists had begun to rethink basic ideas such as "planning," "nationalization," and the place of "markets" in democratic socialist economies. Questioning these and other familiar ideas means confronting the problem of Marxism, since traditional socialist political and economic programs have been derived from Marxian thought.

It is a "problem" because Marxism is at the root of both the socialist tradition that thinks of itself as social democracy or democratic socialism and the tradition that mutated into Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism. Any reinterpretation of socialism must ask, To what extent is Marxism integral to a socialist tradition?

An answer, of course, depends upon what one considers Marxism to be. Today, few would defend a definition of Marxism as "scientific socialism," but other difficulties remain. Although Marx used "utopian" as a term of derision, his own theory, as well as nearly all versions of neo-Marxism, have a characteristic "immanent utopian" cast, to adapt the title of Axel van den Berg's critique of Marxism. That is, almost all Marxian writings assume the historical *inevitability* of the triumph of socialism. The argument for the inevitability of a classless society, comforting and inspiring as the prospect is, cannot be rationally justified. To embrace socialism is to commit oneself to the uncertainty of achieving the goal of socialism, discomforting though the thought may be. The belief in a "scientific socialism" and socialism's inevitability helped nurture the mutant strain of socialist thought that developed into Stalinism. The conclusion seems inescapable: there is no necessary connection between socialism and Marxian thought or, more simply perhaps, one may be a socialist without being a Marxist.

What then of the Marxist heritage in the socialist tradition? First, no form of Marxist or neo-Marxist thought can claim a privileged position; it is one among the many approaches and theories that can be drawn upon to understand the world and to chart courses of action. In practice this means, for example, that though we surrender the idea that class conflict is *the* dynamic historical force, we continue to stress the importance of class and class conflict. Second, stripped of its scientific pretensions and reductive tendencies, Marxian thought remains a powerful example of a social theory with a critical stance toward capitalist social systems. This implies, in practical terms, that a primary focus of socialist theories remains the interests of groups and classes that are the objects of domination. Finally, even though we forgo the immanent utopianism of Marxism, we retain its utopian strain. That is, we continue, in Irving Howe's words, "to dream of a truly human existence."

A tradition links present and past, and to place oneself in a tradition is to assume the burdens of its failures and the satisfactions of its successes. Today, socialism's failures, real and presumed, bulk large in our consciousness, particularly the charge that it is responsible for its mutant offspring. We are tempted, therefore, to disavow a socialist identity, which means reconciling oneself to the bleak prospect of living without much hope for the future. On the other hand, if we hold to utopian visions we subject ourselves to the stress of the critical posture and distance from the society around us. As with other identities, it is hard to be a socialist.

But this is to concentrate excessively upon the tradition's failures. After all, the welfare state, many of the advances in political democracy, and mitigation of the soul-destroying grind of the industrial work place were very much the result of the passions, work, and power of social democratic movements. In embracing socialism we ally our-

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selves with these past triumphs and with predecessors who persevered in the face of daunting obstacles. When all is said and done, to embrace socialism is to become part of an honorable tradition with a past that justifies hope for the future. □

Richard Dicker

PRISONERS' RIGHTS IN CHINA

In the fall of 1992, the information office of China's State Council issued a lengthy white paper entitled *Criminal Reform in China*. The document is filled with sweeping pronouncements buttressed by statistics on China's penal system: the number of prisoners enrolled in classes of various kinds, the rate of recidivism, the employment rate among released prisoners in Beijing and Shanghai, and so on. The document's declared purpose was to "help the people of the world better understand our socialist system with Chinese characteristics."

Because Beijing has barred all independent access to its vast prison system, these statistics cannot be verified. But the central theme of *Criminal Reform in China*—its emphasis on the rights of prisoners and the principles of humane treatment—can be evaluated. International human rights groups have reported that thousands of activists from the 1989 Democracy movement are incarcerated within China's prisons, labor camps, and detention centers. Many were tried and sentenced secretly; others were sent for "reeducation through labor" without any judicial proceedings at all. This widespread arbitrary imprisonment has drawn increasing international criticism.

The white paper does have a potential value that the State Council may not have anticipated. As an official government statement, it sets a standard against which China's actual practice can be assessed.

Citing the experience of pre-revolutionary China, the white paper describes prisons that "were the tools of the feudal, bureaucratic and comprador classes who used them to slaughter revolutionaries and the oppressed people." The document declares that this changed with the founding of the People's Republic of China, in 1949, when "a new type of prison was established—where prisoners are regarded as human beings and where their dignity is respected and they receive fully humane treatment." The new penal regime was rooted in four "Basic Principles": (1) that people can be reformed; (2) humanitarianism; (3) protection for the due rights of criminals; and (4) encouragement for criminals to see their incarceration as a time for reform.

The white paper depicts a system where the procedures for penalties and privileges are codified and the staff is required to abide by them. Prisoners who violate regulations are punished in accordance with prison rules. Punishment by solitary confinement, limited to fifteen days and reserved for serious violators, must be collectively discussed by the prison staff and reported to the leaders of the unit for approval. Prisoners in solitary confinement are let out for fresh air for about an hour twice a day, and enjoy the same living conditions as other prisoners.

This picture is a beguiling one. Prison staff are urged "to have heart-to-heart talks with prisoners" and "to establish emotional and intellectual ties" with them. They are also required to take meals with inmates on major holidays and participate in recreational activity with them.

In a section entitled "Basic Principles of Criminal Reform" it is asserted that "China strictly protects the due rights of criminals. There are specific legal provisions concerning the rights a criminal must enjoy during the entire process. . . ."

Most striking to those who monitor China's human rights practices is the white paper's often stated, solemn prohibition on physical abuse of prisoners: "Chinese law prohibits any maltreatment of prisoners by the prison staff and prisoners have the right to file charges according to the law." The white paper declares that it is strictly forbidden to torture, insult, or otherwise mistreat prisoners. If a warden or guard beats or otherwise mistreats a prisoner, the victim has the right to appeal to the People's Procurate or the People's Court. Humane handling of prisoners in accordance with the law "is the basic principle governing the management of prisons and reform through labor institutions in China."

These grand pronouncements would come as quite a surprise to pro-democracy activists incarcerated in the huge Lingyuan prison in Liaoning province in northeastern China. This facility includes a vast auto assembly complex, where prisoners labor to produce vehicles for export. Among the political prisoners there are Liu Gang and Tang Yuanjuan. Liu was third on the government's list of "Most Wanted" student leaders after June 4, 1989. A democracy activist since the mid-1980s, Liu helped to initiate the campus "Democracy Salons" in 1988. He was arrested, tried for sedition and "counterrevolutionary propaganda," and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Tang, an assistant automobile plant engineer and alleged leader of a "counterrevolutionary group,"

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was sentenced to twenty years—the longest known sentence given to a 1989 democracy advocate.

According to a detailed report from inside Lingyuan between April 1991 and April 1992, political activists there were routinely subjected to torture and humiliating treatment. Punishments ranged from prolonged confinement in tiny isolation cells to abuse by guards wielding high-voltage electric batons. When the activists refused to submit to degrading tests forcing them to acknowledge their "criminal consciousness," they were assaulted by other inmates on the orders of the staff. Later, Liu Gang and five others were shackled with leg irons and thrown into isolation cells. While there, guards applied electric shock to Liu's genitals.

In retaliation for a hunger strike by thirteen of these prisoners in November 1991, two of them were severely abused with electric batons. Two others were force fed through tubes inserted down their esophagi. There has been no indication that any of the guards or wardens have been punished for this.

Prisoners are supposed to enjoy prompt, free medical care and a regular checkup every year. In reality, the health problems of a number of prominent imprisoned political activists have been ignored and their physical well-being has been allowed to deteriorate to where their lives are in jeopardy. The plight of Li Guiren is a case in point. Li, who was the editor-in-chief of Hua Yue Publishing House, is also serving a five year sentence for "counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement." During the winter of 1991–92, Li complained on three occasions of heart palpitations but received no medical attention. In February 1992, Shaanxi provincial authorities rejected his appeals for hospitalization. In March, after repeated international calls, members of the security police visited him in prison to determine how news of his medical condition could have reached the West. In April, he was transferred to another prison, but received no better medical care. By the end of July, Li was unable to walk and had trouble standing. Despite a diagnosis of a serious heart condition and gallstones, all appeals for a transfer to a modern medical facility have been denied.*

The white paper also lists a prisoner's right to exchange letters and to meet regularly with family members. Observance of this right would be especially welcome news for Wang Juntao. Wang, a co-founder of the Beijing Social and Economic Sciences Research Institute, a private think tank that did path-breaking analysis, was sentenced on February 12, 1991, to thirteen years' imprisonment on charges of "conspiring to subvert the government" and the familiar "counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement." He was branded as one of the main instigators of the 1989 movement. In August 1992 Wang went on a hunger strike to protest the state's interference with his right to legal redress. In February 1992, Wang Juntao appointed his wife, Hou Xiaotian, as his agent to pursue two separate legal actions against the government. Wang had prepared documents to give to Hou, but the authorities at Yanqing Prison refused to pass them on to her.

The publication of *Criminal Reform in China* comes less than a year after a November 1991 white paper on *Human Rights in China*. These documents represent Beijing's effort to respond to stinging international criticism. This unprecedented sensitivity is partly rooted in China's extensive trade relations with the United States. China enjoyed an $18.2 billion trade surplus with the United States in 1992. The Chinese government is concerned that the United States will demand human rights improvements as a condition of continuing China's most-favored-nation trading status.

While *Criminal Reform in China* paints a highly misleading picture, the standards it sets forth are now a matter of public record. This new "yardstick" can benefit human rights in China, if the international community holds Beijing accountable to it. Liu Gang, Wang Juntao, and the other imprisoned pro-democracy activists deserve that much. □

* As this article went to press I learned that Li Guiren was "released on bail for medical treatment." This move, taken after the authorities had allowed his health to deteriorate, only underlines the medical plight of China's political prisoners.

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Joseph M. Diamond

AN ECONOMY IN DEEP TROUBLE

The direction of Robert Heilbroner's "An Economy in Deep Trouble" (*Dissent*, Fall 1992) is the need for "transformational growth," to be achieved by a major public-works program and improved education, including a comprehensive apprenticeship system. The problem he sees is in "persuading the American public . . . and the elites . . . that a vigorous public sector is a legitimate part of modern capitalism."

His prescription, it seems to me, does not adequately answer the problem. Consider this scenario: a class of newly hatched apprentices in various skilled trades emerges from the program, certificates in hand, looking forward to useful employment in industries producing cars, aircraft, air conditioners, computers, and so on. Thanks to an expanded road network completed as another element of the plan, they are prepared to commute fifty or even seventy miles each way to work. At this point they run into the sobering fact that those industries have disappeared (gone to Taiwan, China, the Philippines, or Mexico) or have diminished to the level of screwdriver plants, assembling foreign components, in either case having little need for their services. The American Association of Engineering Societies reports that a hundred thousand engineers were laid off in 1991 alone. Why train more?

The improvement of parks, roads, airports, and so on is of course desirable, but is secondary. What is primary is productive, high-paying jobs, turning out the mainline products of everyday life. Given those jobs, people will spend any number of hours commuting by any means necessary, as they do in Japan, whose infrastructure leaves much to be desired. They will even work under a poisonous cloud of sulphurous fumes, as they did in Pittsburgh in its industrial heyday. Needless to say, this is not an endorsement of such conditions. Offered a viable future, American workers will do whatever is necessary, pick up whatever information is necessary, faking it if necessary. Most industrial jobs after all are semiskilled, which means that you can learn the job in three days, and most trained people are overqualified. The Japanese have had no trouble in producing quality cars in this country with American workers.

If not education and infrastructure but jobs are primary, what is the way out? The answer can only be re-industrialization, which requires protectionism. We cannot compete with Japan, a country where children commit suicide in fear of facing an exam, where adults are worked to death, and where every component of society is rigged as part of the assault on the world economy. Consider another scenario: a major road building program is launched. But, with some exaggeration, what is gained if the earth-moving equipment is made by Komatsu, the workers arrive at the site in Toyotas, wearing work clothes made in Korea? Our trade with Europe on the other hand is more balanced, essentially a trade in specialties, unlike our imports from Japan, which are essentially mainline products, above all cars. We also note that cars are very much a low-to-medium tech product, and here I agree with Heilbroner that we ought not pin our hopes on advanced technology.

Heilbroner surprisingly minimizes the issue of the deficit, omitting mention of the burden of interest payments. These payments reflect the fact that the Republicans, pursuing their aim of dismantling the New Deal, have spent the country's surplus for the next generation in advance, limiting, as intended, the government's ability to finance social programs. As a consequence, that generation will inevitably face a lowering of living standards. The problem is to spread the burden fairly, to keep it from degenerating into a squabble over scraps. It will not be easy; the average American still assumes he or she can look forward to two houses, three cars, four television sets, and new clothes every season — a standard of living based, except for the houses, largely on imported products. As such expectations dwindle, the danger of a slide into bitterness and social strife increases. The tragedy, of course, is that the deficit was not accumulated to finance productive capital improvement, but as a substitute for the

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taxation needed for ordinary government functions. The borrowed money was used, on the governmental plane, for consumption rather than investment, a procedure that Heilbroner rightly tells us is ill advised.

Finally, Heilbroner describes a strong correlation between the extent of public capital investment and economic performance in Japan, Germany, Canada and the United States, with the United States showing up badly. An objection can be made to the comparison: in Japan and Germany heavy investment was needed to rebuild the war-damaged infrastructure, and in the case of Japan to modernize a fairly poor society. Canada, on the other hand, is in the position (like Norway and Sweden) of running a very large country with a small population, an inherently expensive business in terms of infrastructure. □

Branko Horvat

MARKET SOCIALISM: A FEW COMMENTS

Disagreements may arise because of differences in opinion and evaluation or because of differently known and understood facts and logic. I sympathize with the spirit of Thomas Weisskopf's essay (*Dissent* 1992), but I want to make three specific comments about the second type of disagreement. As I have written extensively elsewhere on the issues raised, I shall confine myself to a brief explanation. Besides, this is not a place to engage in a technical analysis.

Weisskopf writes:

"Although the replacement of private with social control and income rights at the enterprise level is what most clearly distinguishes market socialism from [market] capitalism. . . ."

This is neither true nor is the statement exhaustive. Proprietorships and individual farming are completely compatible with socialism. Differing specifics concerning the two systems lie in the social organization of large enterprises that produce about two-thirds of total national output. These enterprises are organized as various sorts of corporations. Proprietorship evolved into the private corporation, and the state enterprise evolves (or will evolve) into a social corporation.

The private corporation is controlled by largely self-appointed management and is privately owned. The latter is taken as an ideological justification for the legalistic fiction that the owners (shareholders) control it.

The social corporation is controlled (somewhat more realistically) by the employees and is socially owned. The latter means that every citizen owns one virtual share of national capital, which cannot be either bought or sold. Therefore, the capital distribution is completely egalitarian and the dividends are expressed in the increasing standard of living.

It is usually not observed that the *basic* control of the two corporations is performed by the market, and therefore the market is important for socialism (that is, an organized and not laissez-faire market). Besides, labor control is somewhat more efficient than control by absentee owners, and therefore a social corporation will be more efficient than a private corporation, as a rule.

Naturally, economic democracy and social relations play an important role, and the organization of firms is bound to influence the organization of the society profoundly. But I restrict myself to purely economic elements, because they are usually not well understood.

Further, Weisskopf contends:

"Defenders of capitalism have long argued that markets cannot work properly unless they are embedded in a system of property rights that enables private individuals to own, buy and sell shares in the means of production."

The statement is based on a widespread confusion. It is true that markets cannot work without clearly defined property rights. That is in fact a tautology. The implication that this necessarily implies private ownership is a non sequitur. In every market economy (capitalist, socialist, or any other),

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the primary owner is the firm. The firm is registered with the court, engages in all productive, selling, and financial transactions autonomously, hires (and fires) labor and capital, reaps profits, and repays its debts. Who is the owner of the firm is largely irrelevant as far as the market is concerned. The potential owners are private individuals, partners, members of a cooperative, workers in a worker-owned enterprise, state and parastatal entities, or society as a whole. In other words, ownership may be private, collective, state, or social. If we have a well-organized (and also not ideologically dominated) market, it will be advisable to select the most efficient type of ownership by market competition.

In short, market implies ownership but not necessarily a private one. The firm owns property and the firm may be owned by nonprivate entities without jeopardizing the operations of the market, including activities of the capital market. Private dividends are compatible with socialism, as is interest on saving deposits that represents an equivalent exchange of past and present labor time for increasing productivity.

Weisskopf also says that

"market socialist enterprises are clearly not subject to hostile takeovers, so their managers don't face the same ultimate threat as managers of capitalist firms."

Why not? A social corporation has an internal fund of socially owned capital that may be expressed in shares kept by the corporation. If the internally generated surplus is not sufficient for investment undertaken, the corporation may issue external shares (as well as issue bonds or borrow from the bank). If external shares represent more than 50 percent of total capital, a hostile takeover is possible, the incompetent management and individual troublemakers will be fired, the failing firm reorganized, and then the prevailing labor-managed administration re-established in the same way as is done in capitalist firms.

Some sort of hostile turnover is possible when the firm becomes insolvent and the bank or government will not bail it out. But there is also a third possibility, which reflects the greater flexibility of a labor-managed economy. If a firm suffers losses that no longer can be covered out of reserve funds, and workers apply for guaranteed income that no longer can be covered by the firm itself, the firm will be put under receivership, labor management suspended, and a temporary manager appointed by a specialized

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THE CASE FOR PRAGMATIC MARKET SOCIALISM
James A. Yunker

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public agency. Now three possibilities exist: (1) either the firm is reorganized and made profitable again and it regains its autonomy, or (2) the firm is sold ("hostile takeover"), or (3) it is proclaimed bankrupt.

Generally, one may note that a socialist firm is *potentially* more efficient than a capitalist firm. Whether it will be also more efficient in real life depends on cultural factors, including the entire institutional setup. Let me illustrate the problem with a comparison. Probably everybody will agree that capitalism is economically more efficient than slavery. In ancient Rome all essential ingredients of capitalism existed: private ownership and Roman law regulating transactions, market, hired labor, factories, money and credit, foreign exchange and foreign trade. In a sense the market was more universal than the present market because apart from the commodity and money markets there was also a market in human beings. And yet capitalism did not develop; cultural factors and technology were not conducive to it. Are they conducive to socialism today? □

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Jack Metzgar

NEW ROLES FOR UNIONS?

NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE: A LABOR PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN BUSINESS, by Barry Bluestone and Irving Bluestone. Basic Books, 1992. 325 pp. $25.

More baloney is written and spoken around "employee involvement" (EI) than any other issue in American business. But it's a mistake to dismiss this movement as "just baloney." Twenty years of experimentation and more than a decade of careful academic study of these workplace programs make it clear that democratic, participative organizations are able to outperform hierarchical, authoritarian ones. A workplace that taps the insight and knowledge of its workers will be more productive and produce better goods and services.

There's no better guide to the progressive potential of employee involvement than this new book by the Family Bluestone. Irving, the father, is a former production grinder for the General Motors Corp. who worked his way up through the ranks of the United Auto Workers (UAW), retiring as its vice president in charge of negotiations with GM. Barry, his son, is an economist and co-author, with Bennett Harrison, of two books that had wide impact among labor and community activists in the 1980s—*The Deindustrialization of America* and *The Great U-Turn*. Like Barry's previous books with Bennett Harrison, this is economics and labor relations written for a general audience, while offering a wholly original analysis that specialists (both academics and practitioners) will be unable to ignore.

A book that comes with jacket-cover endorsements from the Steelworkers president, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, three secretaries of labor (including the current one), and the president of the United States is bound to have an impact.

To assess its value and likely impact it's necessary to consider not only its arguments, but the audiences to whom these arguments are addressed. Managers are likely to see the book as too pro-union and unionists as too pro-management (which it is!). The people to whom it will appeal the most are those—like academics and politicians—who have neither management nor union responsibilities. And I suspect this is very much by design. The strategy is to use public interest and pressure to get both unions and managements to rethink how they've been doing things.

The Bluestones want a revolution in labor-management relations, and they argue that the future of the U.S. economy depends on it. They believe that workplace-based employee involvement needs to be extended in what they call an "Enterprise Compact," so that union workers have a say in all aspects of management. The details of their Enterprise Compact take up only a small portion of the book. Here's where they call for a breath-taking redefinition of both management's role and unionism. From a union perspective, the Bluestones' Enterprise Compact is probably the worst idea since the Wobblies got it into their heads that labor contracts were a "bourgeois ruse" to be avoided like the plague. But this should not overshadow their overall conception or their other distinctive argument—the importance of unions in the American economy.

Most analyses of what the Bluestones call "the glory days" of U.S. economic prosperity, the postwar period from roughly 1945 to 1970, see the strength of unionism during those years as merely a consequence of economic good times. The Bluestones show that matters were not nearly so simple:

> [T]he causation between economic growth and the strength of organized labor ran both ways. . . . unions played a pivotal role in maintaining postwar prosperity, not only for their own members but for the nation as a whole. The contract demands made by organized labor and the settlements it ultimately concluded with management provided workers with better wages

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> and benefits and reasonably steady employment—both of which contributed to higher consumption levels and therefore higher GNP and employment. . . . Indeed, without the increasing wages and benefits won by unions, it is unlikely that the immediate post-war consumption and investment boom could have sustained the glory days for much more than a decade. "Wage-led" growth sustained the boom for a quarter of a century.

This analysis is crucial to their argument about restoring U.S. competitiveness and prosperity. Unions were a fundamental part of the solution then, and they're a fundamental part of the solution now. Therefore, the Bluestones argue for changes in labor law that will facilitate organizing and otherwise strengthen unionism in America.

But they are also critical of unions, which they see as inadequate in their response to today's more competitive and more global economic environment. Unions need to be, as some have been, much more actively involved in changing work systems and management practices that undermine the economic health of both private firms and public institutions. The Bluestones marshal evidence to show that employee involvement programs have often been successful in doing just this, and that such programs are more successful in union workplaces than in nonunion settings—evidence that has turned upside down the widespread management assumption that employee involvement is antithetical to or a substitute for unionism.

Somewhere in the employee involvement section, however, the Bluestones take a wrong turn and just keep going. Their conception of an Enterprise Compact logically derives from their analysis of EI programs and the power of union-management joint action in some notable cases. Using the GM Saturn plant as a model, the Bluestones argue that the union should be involved in "all strategic enterprise decisions" through a consensus decision-making process similar to that at Saturn. There would be no "management rights clause," and the union would have a say in, and veto power over, corporate decisions on product pricing, purchasing of raw material, marketing and advertising, methods of production and the introduction of new technology, investments in new capital and products, and the subcontracting of production. In an Enterprise Compact product quality would be a strikable issue, and there would be no layoffs.

All of these are desirable new powers from a union perspective. But why would a management agree to such a systematic loss of managerial discretion? Because the Enterprise Compact links wages and benefits directly to productivity and profits. Without dramatic improvements in productivity (the Bluestones set 6 percent annual increases as a goal), workers' income would stagnate. On the other hand, if workers were able to increase productivity dramatically, the Enterprise Compact would require not only wage increases but price reductions that would allow the company to grab market share from competitors. Increasing market share would presumably increase profits, and in the best-case scenario workers might become rich. The whole system is designed to transform workers and management into an entrepreneurial team whose goal is to "beat the competition."

And that's the problem. For "the competition" includes other workers, whose wages and standards would deteriorate and whose jobs would be lost unless they could come up with equally powerful productivity increases. The Enterprise Compact strips the union of any responsibility for *industry-wide* standards and makes solidarity among workers in the same craft or industry (let alone as a class) obsolete.

Though the Bluestones do not say it quite this way, they are very much aware that this is a "new brand of unionism." In such an arrangement, union workers would be organized not by craft (the AFL mode) or by industry (the CIO mode), but by company.

Many unionists would call this "company unionism," and would deny that there is anything new in it. But "company unionism" as it has been practiced in the United States means that the company completely dominates the worker representation process and that there is no real union in the workplace. Some argue that this would inevitably happen if GM's Saturn experiment were generalized, but this is not the Bluestones' conception. Their Enterprise Compact envisions a real union with a binding labor agreement and real—in fact, expanded—powers. Victor Reuther, one of the founders of the UAW, more properly calls the kind of thing the Bluestones are advocating "enterprise unionism," and Reuther and others have developed a thorough critique of it.

But whatever you call it, the Bluestones are advocating something that would redefine unionism for the worse. Unionism, outside of Japan, has been based on building *unity among workers*. This is not easy, as there are real conflicts of interest among workers, as well as a host of imagined ones. But the

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very idea of a union has meant that workers must stick together and refuse to compete with each other over basic standards. The Bluestones would reverse all this. It would no longer be the *United* Auto Workers against the auto companies as a group, trying to win the best deal they can. Rather it would be the workers, managers, and owners at GM against the workers, managers, and owners at Ford. Every gain for the GM workers would mean more pressure on the Ford workers to "compete," and vice versa and so on. This might be good for the U.S. economy, for a while at least, if GM and Ford workers in their competitive frenzy were able to chase out Japanese and German imports. But Japanese and German workers (and managers and owners) are no fools. They'd develop strategies to "compete," as would Mexicans and Koreans. It is naive to think that this global competition would be based strictly on productivity and quality, and never on reducing wages, working conditions, and living standards.

The logic of unfettered market competition is antiworker, and that's why unions have been successful in raising wages and standards only when they have been able to limit competition across a craft or an industry. The Bluestones themselves show clearly the advantages of both oligopoly and government regulation in achieving our postwar prosperity. Creative unionism has played an important role, through organized pressure at the workplace and in the political arena, in limiting the degree of competition in organized industries. Today it's different, and more difficult—the competition is global, and unions are falling apart everywhere. But it should be clear, as it is not to the Bluestones, that the *union* approach is to organize internationally, to build unity among workers, and to control competition.

Workers have a lot to offer management, if management will only listen. And unions need to help management manage better, including helping to improve productivity and product quality. But they cannot become fixated on the enterprise level, nor can they abandon the independence of the traditional union structure. From the Mine Workers' early twentieth-century efforts to organize an employers' association with which to bargain, to more recent attempts by unions like the International Ladies Garment Workers to develop industrial policies to make an entire industry more stable and competitive, the traditional union focus on helping to manage its *industry* is based on both moral and practical grounds. Without a stable set of relationships that limit competition, even a growing market in an expanding economy will not automatically result in better conditions for workers. Unions must, as in the past, keep companies from destroying each other through ruthless competition. Only solidarity among workers can give unions this power. And for that reason unions require a nonnegotiable ethical commitment from their members—worker solidarity.

The Bluestones have thought long and hard about how to strengthen unions and empower working people in a complex and difficult new environment. They have done the labor movement a service by thinking through one of its options clearly. But in considering the Bluestones' Enterprise Compact, most unionists will understand that unions have both a much narrower and a much broader set of responsibilities than the Bluestones seem to realize.□

Ellen Willis

NOTES ON CAM P.

SEX, ART, AND AMERICAN CULTURE: ESSAYS, by Camille Paglia. Vintage Books, 1992. 337 pp. pb. $13.00.

1. She's loud! She's angry! She's on a speed trip! She's an egomaniac! She wears red lipstick! She interrupts! She's a dirty fighter! She calls names! She's on her twenty-first minute of fame! She defends Woody Allen! She loves her bad reviews! She doesn't care who likes her! Except for Madonna! Or at least she acts as if she doesn't!

2. What I have in common with Camille Paglia: in 1969 we knew the Rolling Stones were the greatest rock band in the world. We're Simone de Beauvoir, Elizabeth Taylor, Mary McCarthy, and Norman O. Brown fans. (Yes, Madonna fans, too; but who isn't?) We're not Lacan or Foucault fans. We agree that feminists' dismissal of Freud was a terrible mistake and that you can't talk about sex without talking about biology or rape without talking about sex. We hate the brand of feminism that defines women as nurturing, compassionate, and nice. We identify with the demon decade—the hedonistic neon side of the sixties, not the moralistic earthtone side.

3. A while ago, as I read a newspaper article about a purported female serial killer of men (later it turned out that the story was considerably more complicated), an involuntary smile came to my lips. I offer this anecdote, along with my fondness for the

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movie *Basic Instinct*, as partial metaphor for my response to the Paglia phenomenon. Some readers will object that Paglia's targets are mostly women, with a few gay men thrown in. Those readers will have a good point.

4. What *I* don't have in common with Camille Paglia: well, to start with, while I write about pop culture figures, she has managed to become one. This is not an easy thing for an intellectual to do. Many of us imagine that we would love to do it, but even those of us who are theoretically hip about what it takes to be a media star tend to speak visual with a literary accent. Paglia disclaims any conscious attempt to become a celebrity. "What has happened is not my doing but that of the Zeitgeist," she asserts in the introduction to her collected essays and ravings, *Sex, Art, and American Culture*. "I was not in control of my career when it was a disaster, and I am not in control of it now." Rather, "There is a hunger for new ways of seeing and thinking. Anti-establishment mavericks like me are back in fashion. It's a classically American story, the loner riding out of the desert to shoot up the saloon and run the rats out of town."

Right there she shows that consciously or not, she knew exactly what to do: conjure up an irresistible image, preferably one that's novel (a *female* Gary Cooper) and "classically American" at the same time. (Speaking of conscious—and of irresistible—does Paglia mean to allude to Oriana Fallaci's wonderful interview with Henry Kissinger, in which her subject compares himself to a cowboy?) And once the Zeitgeist threw her onstage, she handled the opportunity like a pro. Certainly this book is best understood as an extension of her public persona. It includes a more or less verbatim transcription of one of her talks ("The M.I.T. Lecture"), complete with stage directions ("[*imitates electrocution-like spasms*]") and questions from the audience; a compendium of interviews in the wake of her notorious *Newsday* piece on date rape (which is also reprinted); and three appendices—"Look ma! I'm a pop academic!"—that serve up a history and detailed bibliography of her media coverage, along with a gaggle of cartoons (one portrays her in a Madonna outfit, another has her waving a weapon-like spatula while burning the eggs she is making for the rapper Ice Cube, who glares sullenly at his plate).

5. Paglia is a great polemicist, great because even though she is merciless toward those who have offended her notions of the true and the beautiful, she is not mean-spirited about it. That is, her rhetoric is powered by an urgent sense of so much horseshit, so little time, rather than a desire to humiliate her targets. Granted that if you're hit by a bulldozer (like the hapless lecturer who attempted a Lacanian interpretation of fashion photography in Paglia's horrified presence), you aren't going to care much whether the driver was aiming at you or merely clearing a path; but this is a victim's eye metaphor. From the spectator's point of view (and her polemics are somehow visual even when they're printed), the image of Paglia as grandiose, pop Lone Ranger gets closer to the spirit of her undertaking. Those bullets of uninhibited scorn, passionate hero worship, and outrageous generalization, encased in gleaming English prose, hit a scene overdue for a shakeup; if her aim isn't always true, the noise is a relief. Zing! Down the legions of intellectual accountants who squelch imaginative speculation about the human condition by dismissing it as "essentialist." Zing! Eat dirt, post-structuralist pedants, deniers of the body and the pulsing self. Zing! feminist puritans, anti-pop snobs, middle-class nicemakers, sanitizers, euphemizers, advocates of a constitutional amendment decreeing that equality means always having to say you're sorry.

The most spectacular of these shootouts, worth the price of the book, is "Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders: Academe in the Hour of the Wolf," which first appeared in the journal *Arion*. It starts out by attacking two books on homosexuality as the scholarly equivalent of junk bonds, and goes on to rail against French theory ("The Seventies French fad was a flight from Sixties truths, a reactionary escape into false abstraction and rationalism, masquerading as distrust of reason. . . . We didn't need Derrida: we had Jimi Hendrix"), women's studies ("a jumble of vulgarians, bunglers, whiners, French faddicts, apparatchiks, doughface party-liners, pie-in-the-sky utopianists, and bullying, sanctimonious sermonizers"), academic careerism ("the academic theorists were the first wave of yuppie speculators, the first corporate raiders of the Wall Street gilded age. . . . Gain power by attacking power! Make a killing! Be a master of the universe! Call this number in Paris *now*!"), and more. Yes, she's unfair, the apocalyptic urgency is overblown, there's a certain kind of know-nothingism in her blanket condemnation of women's studies and her dismissal of the Holy Trinity (Derrida, Lacan, Foucault) as utterly without redeeming social value. But face it (all you postmod junk-bond dealers out there), her basic point is right: the imperious ubiquity of poststructuralist language at once homogenizes thought and makes unthinkable the realm of the wordless, of direct experience,

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psychedelic vision, love's body; and in that sense it is part of the anti-sixties backlash.

6. Back to Paglia's rendezvous with the Zeitgeist: it has another, less attractive side. When *Sexual Personae* was published in 1990, the steamroller of sexual repression, which had picked up speed during the Carter administration and run amok under Reagan, was just beginning to lose momentum. Repression, after all, runs on the stores of closeted energy that Carter's lust in the heart and Reagan's sunny sadism represented. Under the libidinally impaired Bush, a slight, at first barely perceptible energy leak began. There followed several attempts to rev up the engine once more: the Gulf War (the most spectacular, but the shortest lived); the crusade against "pornographic" sexually dissident art; and—most important for my present purposes—the attack on "political correctness." Now I should say first that I am not of the party that argues that "political correctness" does not exist. Anyone who, like me, has traveled in feminist and left circles knows perfectly well that it exists. In fact, the second most clichéd and disingenuous political disclaimer, trumped only by "I'm not a women's libber, but . . .," has to be "I know this is politically incorrect, but. . . ." Never mind. The issue I want to raise is not whether political correctness is a neocon figment or the most serious totalitarian menace since wine and cheese but why political correctness should have become such a hot issue in 1991 and what this has to do with Camille Paglia's making the cover of *New York* and *Harper's* (not *Rolling Stone* so far as I know, though her media biblio notes that she was named the magazine's "Hot Critic" that year).

Anyway, as I was saying, at the turn of the decade the right was still in power, its conventional wisdom had a powerful grip on the culture, including the liberal media—and yet there was that energy leak, a ripple of restlessness, an inchoate desire for something new. Liberals, emotionally tin-eared as always, seized on the restlessness as an occasion for guilt: let us/you/them repent those greedy, callous, rotten eighties ways. This was exactly the wrong thing to do. It handed the right the perfect setup for the p.c. campaign, which brilliantly diverted people's incipient discontent with the Regime of Repression onto . . . feminists, blacks, queers, and pointy-heads! All the pent-up fury at fifteen years' worth of sensual deprivation was now to be concentrated on the piddling forces of left-wing moralism! And what more appealing, iconic figure to embody the contradictory impulses defining this aspect of the Zeitgeist than a rebellious anti-academic academic and anti-feminist feminist of self-professed "wavering sexual orientation" who believes in an innate will to power and says stuff like, "I now see the hierarchical as both beautiful and necessary"?

7. Suppose in 1969 Paglia had run into radical feminists like me (or my friend Karen Durbin, who later wrote a *Ms.* article called "Can a Feminist Love the World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band?"), instead of those New Haven women who, she says, "nearly tarred and feathered" her for defending the Stones and thereby drove her in fear and loathing from the movement? Would her life have taken a totally different turn? Just asking, Camille, just asking.

8. What we don't have in common (continued): what Paglia calls her "Italian pagan Catholicism" resembles Norman Mailer's "radical conservatism." She too sees us as prisoners of sex, fractious egos caught in the muck of our biological natures. And the truth of our biological natures, like it or not, is aggression and violence, domination and submission, and a male-female polarity that Paglia memorably sums up as "Androgen agitates; estrogen tranquilizes" (something obviously went wrong in her case). To fight nature is admirable but doomed. The Dionysian impulse, glorious and destructive, struggles with Apollonian reason and civility in an endless standoff. If all this nature-red-in-tooth-and-claw Darwinian melodrama sounds familiar, not to say banal, you probably went to the same college bull sessions I did.

In contrast to Paglia and to Mailer, I would characterize my own world view as "conservative radicalism" or perhaps "Jewish skeptical utopianism." Paglia waves the banner of Nietzsche and Sade. Modern feminism, as she sees it, is the ideological captive of Rousseau and his belief that nature is benevolent, society corrupt and repressive. In the wake of the May 1968 upheavals, a Frenchman, Jean-François Revel, wrote a book called *Without Marx or Jesus*. Perhaps it is time for a book called *Without Rousseau or Sade*. Human beings are not innately sadistic, my attraction to Paglia's killer prose notwithstanding. Yet neither are we innocents corrupted by outside forces. We are divided beings, whose urge for the intense pleasures of sensory, emotional, and intellectual immersion in the world clashes with the consciousness of our own vulnerability as fragile, mortal animals. Terrified of pain and annihilation, we reject ecstasy in favor of the futile quest for security and control. Starved of the deepest pleasure, we get what joy we can from power. The fall from paradise is our choice, individual and collective, constantly recreated as

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each generation reproduces human culture. It is possible to choose otherwise. Which is not to deny how insanely difficult is the struggle to choose, how very far from inevitable the outcome of that struggle, and how easily it turns into its opposite—an outbreak of the will to power more terrifying than ever.

9. Paglia hates to be called a conservative. She is a libertarian, she protests, pro-prostitution, pro-pornography, pro-abortion. Yet her Sadeian cosmology leads ultimately to conservatism in its profoundest sense. The heroic individual may seize a measure of liberty, but there can be no genuine politics of freedom. Radical feminism offends her not just because of its puritanical, anti-libertarian strain but because of its fundamental claim that women's liberation is a collective, political process. Paglia makes no distinction between these two offenses, stubbornly refusing to recognize the existence of feminist sexual libertarians no matter how often they are called to her attention.

In part this is pop opportunism: the complexities of the feminist sex debate don't lend themselves to her style of media broadside. But on a deeper level, Paglia is convinced that sex is so intractably antisocial and dangerous for women that any feminist critique of the sexual culture is antisexual by definition. "There never was and never will be sexual harmony," she declares in the date rape piece. "Every woman must take personal responsibility for her sexuality, which is nature's red flame. She must be prudent and cautious. . . . When she makes a mistake she must accept the consequences. . . ." and so on. As Paglia sees it, to deny that women who walk alone in the dark will always risk rape and murder not only endangers women by encouraging an unconscionable naiveté, but invalidates the heroism of women who defy convention and accept the risks of seizing their liberty. In contrast, she has no great quarrel with conservative censors and moralists, who merely fulfill the necessary function of maintaining the social order against which heroic individual rebellion can take place. (Her comment on Madonna's "Justify My Love" video: "The video is pornographic. It's decadent. And it's fabulous. MTV was right to ban it. . . .")

Nor is her rejection of cultural change limited to the sexual arena. In a review of a book on career women, she opines, "It is not male society but mother nature who lays the heaviest burden on woman. No husband or day-care center can ever adequately substitute for a mother's attention. My feminist models are the boldly independent and childless Amelia Earhart and Katharine Hepburn, who has been outspoken in her opposition to the delusion of 'having it all.' " This is what Paglia's feminism comes down to: there are, or ought to be, two kinds of women. While most of us float tranquilized in the chthonian estrogen swamp, reveling in motherhood, "the primal source of life" with its "dark, ambiguous dualities," a liberated happy few will stand as shining moral examples to those who aspire to a different path. Either way, women must "take personal responsibility for the path they choose" and above all "stop whining." Well, on that point, at least, I agree: never whine. Yell your head off.

10. What I don't, finally, have in common with Camille Paglia: in her classic *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone, who herself argues that women's liberation requires a revolution against nothing less than nature itself, offers a pithy summation of most people's gut reaction to the early radical feminists' ideas: "*That*? Why you can't change *that*! You must be out of your mind!" With baroque eloquence and passionate conviction, Paglia cries, over and over, "You can't change *that*!" And I'm still crazy after all these years. □

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Julius Lester

MALCOLM X AS ICON

MALCOLM X IN OUR OWN IMAGE, Joe Wood, editor. St. Martin's Press, 1993. 246 pp., $18.95.

It is a strange time, indeed, when a dead man is brought back from the grave to inspire the living. As far as we know, such an act of resurrection costs the dead nothing. It might even be a source of amusement in an otherwise drear eternity. But what does it say of the living?

The ascendancy of Malcolm X as a political icon bespeaks much about a vacuity in the political and intellectual leadership of black America, a leadership that all too often has played the roles of drum majors and majorettes in the cause of a black racial mystique. Malcolm's return also indicates that significant numbers of blacks dwell in valleys of such deep and deathly shadows that their only rays of hope emanate from the charisma of an apparition.

The advantages of having a leader who is dead are several: he can be whomever one wants him to be; he does not have to risk his ideas amid political and economic realities; he cannot betray or fail his followers.

But the adoration of Malcolm X is possible only to the extent that his image as a black man is separated from the content of his political thought. This was done in Spike Lee's film. It is also done in many of the essays in the volume under review.

Joe Wood, the *Village Voice* columnist and editor of *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image*, demonstrates this divorce of form and substance in the opening essay:

> Last year at a music festival in Jackson, Mississippi, I wore my Malcolm X AK-47 T-shirt around those southern Black people and their Whites, and I felt proud; I was telling everyone what seemed obvious—I am Black. I was also announcing that I—and not anyone else—was the particular bearer of this "true" Black spirit. Wearing that T-shirt made me feel "real" Black, lean and competitive with the rest (as if my Blackness could compete with anybody's, especially anybody who resided in Mississippi). This competition even extended to members of non-African-American communities, to sympathetic members of those groups. Malcolm was making me Blacker than all, with little but the aid of his face, vested with the spirit of *my* people. . . .
>
> Putting on the T-shirt that morning, I was also feeling the kind of anger you need to stay sane; periodic anger; cleansing, defining rage. Sometimes one needs this—these Black acts.

The form is an aggressive racial pride. The spoken content is an expression of racial superiority. (Notice especially the contempt toward other blacks in the phrase "those southern Black people and their Whites.") The unspoken content is, however, racial inferiority. Only those who feel themselves to be without moral substance would feel " 'real' Black, lean and competitive with the rest" by wearing a T-shirt.

Earlier in the essay, Wood poignantly describes the *angst* of the contemporary black ethos.

> In these hungry times, many African-Americans are hungry for an honorable sanctuary. . . . When used as a shelter—as a tool for emotional alliance—spirit, despite being fragile as a ghost, helps people weather alienation, despair, and weariness. . . . But we also seek a map to a better society. Ideology does that. *In the absence of a viable ideology, we settle with spirit; with spirit at our sides, we seek its signs: Malcolm, once dead, returns.* (Emphasis added)

How desolate the inner landscape of those who seek salvation in the graveyard. How devoid of confidence in their own spirits that they wear T-shirts and hats brandishing the X as if it were a weapon of war in a medieval duchy. How impoverished the souls of those black folks that they need find spirit in the remembered anger of a dead man.

In death as in life, no one in black American history has incarnated anger like Malcolm X. It is this anger that fills the senses of Joe Wood.

> . . . Malcolm argued vigorously for one particular notion of Black spirit—a "true" Black spirit, meaning "militant," "proud," "angry." Malcolm's icon has consequently come to signify the "truest" distillation of this Black spirit, and therefore the best product to validate and express "real" Black anger; anger about the way Black People have been treated everywhere we are Black, anger about the way we are now treated in America.

But anger is not political. It is merely raw energy, roiling with sound and fury. And, regardless of how righteous anger makes one feel, it is not moral. Black anger "about the way we are now treated in America" must be accompanied by black anger at

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how "we" have permitted ourselves to be treated, by black anger at how "we" have treated ourselves. The extent to which one is angry at another is the extent to which one embraces the identity of a victim.

Expressions of anger and pride give one the veneer of radicalism. Such emotional exhibitionism appears radical only if one is deathly afraid.

When one looks beneath Malcolm's anger and expressions of pride, the politics uncovered is black supremacy as promulgated by the Nation of Islam. In his contribution to the book Cornel West observes:

> The basic aim of Black Muslim theology—with its distinct Black supremacist account of the origins of white people—was to counter white supremacy. Yet, this preoccupation with white supremacy still allowed white people to serve as the principal point of reference.

This is evident in Malcolm's life. For all else that his autobiography expresses, it is also a painful description of racial self-hatred. In his youth, notes Arnold Rampersad, Malcolm was proud of his light skin, but later "he came to hate the 'blood' that had made it so; in short he came to hate himself."

> The idea of Malcolm's self-hatred or of his ambivalence about his skin color is unpalatable to some of his admirers. Spike Lee, casting his motion picture about Malcolm, wanted no such complication: to play the part of Malcolm he chose a richly brown-skinned actor, Denzel Washington. . . . the colorization of Malcolm is designed for political ends.

Most of the essayists in this volume do not want to engage Malcolm's racial self-hatred and the extent to which racial self-hatred is the substance of black life today. The essayists include some of the better known black intellectuals, academics, and journalists: Amiri Baraka, John Edgar Wideman, Patricia Williams, Cornel West, Angela Davis, Patricia Williams, Arnold Rampersad, and Adolph Reed, Jr., among others.

It is surprising, then, that, for the most part, the essays are apolitical and ahistorical, that is, they consider Malcolm X without regard to the politics of his time or ours, and as if he were an original political thinker. He did not pretend to be that. For nine-tenths of his political life he took pride in himself as a Black Muslim and as spokesman for "the Honorable Elijah Muhammad," a phrase that came from his mouth with regularity.

Unfortunately, the essayists are unable to separate themselves from the seductive charisma of his anger to look at the racist content of his politics. Cornel West's essay, one of the two best in the collection, understands that there was (and is) a dangerous edge to Malcolm's articulation of anger:

> In contrast to Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad and Martin Luther King, Jr., understood one fundamental truth about Black rage: It must neither be ignored nor ignited. Both leaders, in their own ways, knew how to work with Black rage in a constructive manner, shape it through moral discipline, channel it into political organization, and guide it by charismatic leadership. Malcolm X could articulate Black rage much better than Elijah Muhammad or Martin Luther King, Jr.—but for most of his public life he tended to ignite Black rage and harness it for the Nation of Islam.

West compares Malcolm X and King and finds King's contribution to be the greater.

> Like Elijah Muhammad (and unlike Malcolm X), Martin Luther King, Jr., concluded that Black rage was so destructive and self-destructive that without a moral theology and political organization, it would wreak havoc on Black America. His project of nonviolent resistance to white racism was an attempt to channel Black rage in political directions that preserved Black dignity and changed American society.

Alone among the essayists, West raises questions about the "conversion" Malcolm underwent on his trip to Mecca. West wonders if "his relative silence" about the absolute monarchies of the Arab world "bespeak a downplaying of the role of democratic practices in empowering oppressed peoples?"

> Malcolm found the most striking feature of the Islamic regimes not to be their undemocratic practices but their acceptance of his Black humanity. This great prophet of Black rage—with all his brilliance, courage, and conviction—remained blind to basic structures of domination based on class, gender, and sexual orientation in the Middle East.

Unfortunately, West retreats from his daring analysis and in his conclusion rather disingenuously states that Malcolm, unlike Elijah Muhammad and Martin Luther King, Jr., "did not live long enough to forge his own distinctive ideas and ways of

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channeling black rage in constructive channels to change American society." That is true when Malcolm is compared to Elijah Muhammad. That is not true where King is concerned because Malcolm was born four years before King and both men were killed at age 39. They had the same amount of time.

The premier essay of this collection is Adolph Reed's "The Allure of Malcolm X and the Changing Character of Black Politics." Reed is the author of *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon: The Crisis of Purpose in African American Politics*, a critical and sadly ignored analysis of Jackson's career. However, Reed, a professor at Northwestern, brings his considerable knowledge and analytical skill to bear on Malcolm X and places the resurgence of interest in him in the context of black politics today.

For those who argue that the resurrection of Malcolm X indicates how little has changed for black people since 1965, Reed points out that Malcolm X was killed "before the Watts uprising," before the enunciation of Black Power, before the election of the first black mayor. Instead, Reed maintains that the return of Malcolm X has nothing to do with a chimerical similarity between conditions for blacks now and blacks in the early sixties, but has everything to do with the black ethos of today:

> . . . Malcolmania has come at the same time as Jackson's attempt to embody the Black Leader myth appears to be running out of steam. . . . The King, Jackson, and Malcolm iconologies that have spread during the Reagan/Bush era—as well as the mythos of the singular Black Leader that connects them—are most meaningfully expressions of the tendency toward evasiveness that has undermined development of critical vision in black politics in the postsegregation era. Yes, the turn to Malcolm in part reflects deepening frustration with material conditions and Jackson's failure, but more importantly, it reproduces the vicarious, or even apolitical approach to politics that undergirded the earlier romanticizations of King and Jackson.

The invocation of Malcolm X at a time when black poverty is rampant, when more than half of black children are born to teenage single women, when 47 percent of black seventeen-year-olds are functionally illiterate, when the number one cause of death for black young men is either murder or suicide "amounts to wishing away the complexities that face us."

With the exception of the essays by West and Reed, this collection is an example of that evasiveness. However, omitted from its pages are some of the most provocative black thinkers of today: Shelby Steele, Glenn Loury, Stanley Crouch, William Julius Wilson, Stephen Carter, and Harold Cruse. *In Our Own Image* fails by excluding black intellectuals whose angles of vision are not through a glass darkly. Until black intellectuals stop confusing shadows and reality, black political life will continue to be bereft of vision and the maturity that makes icons unnecessary. □

Peter Mandler

WRITTEN BY CANDLELIGHT

CUSTOMS IN COMMON, by E.P. Thompson. The New Press, 1992. 547 pp. $29.95.

There is a powerful current in English political writing that is simultaneously radical and traditional. It is radical because harshly critical of the revolutionary impact of capitalism on the everyday life of the common people. It is traditional because it harks back to the small, rooted, roughly egalitarian communities of a premodern age. In its more Tory guises (in Carlyle, for instance, and often in Ruskin), it harks right back to mythically integrated Catholic, feudal communities. In less overtly nostalgic and romantic forms, however—in the radicalism of William Cobbett, for instance—it often finds a more comfortable home in the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century local communities were already able to use "modern" tools—literacy, a degree of prosperity, democratic ideas—to win themselves some autonomy from the control of the rich and powerful, yet these same communities had not yet been leveled by the more lethal forces of "modernization": the tyranny of private property, the subordination of customary rights and responsibilities to ruthlessly rapid economic growth, the homogenization of the local community by the centralizing State. Nor were these communities limited to passive resistance. They could use the same "modern" tools to construct fruitful syntheses of past and present: to re-present unwritten customs as the "rights of man," for instance, or to re-form the mutualities of the traditional rural community in urban settings, in trade unions or friendly societies or political parties. In this way "tradition" might survive even in the bowels of modernity, a reservoir of consciousness remaining to be drawn upon to help us respond to change and to remind us of alternative ways of life. Just as Burke saw history as a chain of

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links forged by our masters for our benefit, so this kind of radical sees history as a chain we forge ourselves (albeit not in circumstances of our own choosing). "Successive generations . . . stand in an apprentice relation to each other," writes Thompson in his latest book, but he is standing Burke on his head: his generations are composed not of rulers but of subjects.

The further we get from the eighteenth century, of course, the harder it is to see this apprentice relationship holding. It was relatively easy for Cobbett to champion the agricultural laborer's "traditional" rights and customs in the early nineteenth century, when capitalist modernization had hardly begun to roll. And in England, the first industrial nation, these forces actually rolled more slowly than elsewhere. In the 1930s and 1940s another tradition-bent radical, George Orwell, could compare his England to more rapidly modernizing nations like Russia or Germany and still feel the chain of connection to his great-great-grandparents. Then, in Orwell's lifetime, E.P. Thompson began to think out his classic history, *The Making of the English Working Class* (ultimately published in 1963). Far from concluding that migration, urbanization, population growth, industrialization, and "mass society" had cut off the English working class from their forebears, he depicted the Industrial Revolution as a period when custom was not dissolved but re-presented and re-formed as class consciousness. Much of the spirit of those eighteenth-century communities was preserved in the practices and institutions of the English working class. The industrial workers he encountered as an adult education teacher in Yorkshire in the 1950s were recognizably the descendants of the handloom weavers, the agricultural laborers, and the urban artisans of the 1830s. Local newspapers of the 1950s often featured reminiscences by old people of the 1880s, telling stories of "rough music" and other premodern rituals little changed in form or content from centuries earlier.

Another generation on, and can we still say the same thing? In a period when, some have argued, the English working class has been *unmade*, can we still feel the blood of our ancestors throb in our veins in quite the same way? Tellingly, in his new book, Thompson has not moved forward but backward. (Here I leap over his fifteen years of political engagement in the peace movement, but I'll return to it.) He has collected and synthesized his writings of the past two decades on the eighteenth century into a fierce and moving prequel to *The Making*, a panorama of plebeian culture in the period when "tradition" was most articulately defined and defended.

On the evidence of these pages it is clear that Thompson still feels personally connected to these people and these events. He is not yet seventy, yet at times he sounds as old as the hills. He tells a story of the villagers of Charnwood in Leicestershire defending their common pasturage against aristocratic incursion in 1749 almost as if it were a piece of well-known village gossip. Indeed, his source is an epic poem, "The Charnwood Opera," written "in a mid-eighteenth century hand," discovered—early this century?—by a Nottingham bookseller, passed on to one historian, who then transcribed it and passed it on to Thompson "many years ago." He envies the late Victorian folklore collectors, who were so much closer to the real thing, though they didn't appreciate adequately the world they had lost. When scholars younger than he cast doubt on his earlier findings and accuse him of sentimentalizing his protagonists, he responds with superior indignation: *they* haven't spent enough time in the archives, *they* haven't got to know these people well enough. Historiographical fashions turn round like the seasons, theories come and go, but Thompson has his tendrils sunk down into historical bedrock—into real experience—and it would be a betrayal of his eighteenth-century friends to revise his views. What he does in this book is to send his tendrils down further, to reach ever subtler details of lived experience in the eighteenth century, but all in the same analytical framework of customs held by the mass of the people "in common" and defended against men of power and authority.

And why should he revise his views? On a technical level, I think Thompson is right to challenge the latest historiographical fashion, which tends to view eighteenth-century society as consensual to a high degree, dominated neither by patricians nor plebeians but by a "polite and respectable" middling sort. But my concern here is to capture Thompson less as a professional historian than as a political writer. And in this context the traditional tone he adopts is marked and, to a degree, limiting. It is grumpy, exasperated, and rather exclusive; it is constantly over-trumping the corrupt present with the purer past. If postwar society has progressively distanced itself from its traditional roots, Thompson will hold out. He will remain the scholar-artisan, faithful to his materials.

Where does this put Thompson in relation to the world we actually live in? At this point we must

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recall that, far from being an other-worldly scholar retreating ever further into his archives, Thompson devoted most of the 1980s to an exhausting personal engagement with the movement for nuclear disarmament. He published several volumes of political essays, not simply on the cold war but on the rise of the security state, on threats to civil liberties, on Thatcherism and Reaganism. For a time he was one of the best-known radio personalities in Britain (in a place and a time when being a "radio personality" still meant something), so much so that political pressure was applied to deny him a prestigious lecturing opportunity on the BBC. He was, in short, the British Noam Chomsky, but less marginal.

Re-reading these political essays, it is hard to contain one's admiration. The sententious cadences of the prose (I mean this in the wholly respectful sense), the cascades of scorn poured down upon the complacently powerful, the rents torn in the veil of *raison d'etat*: this is what oppositional writing should be, very much in the vein of William Hazlitt, one of Thompson's great heroes. But what is curious and a bit alarming about these essays is how much they have to say about the structures of power and the constraints on action, and how little about the bases for opposition. They reverse the priorities of his historical writing: it is all enemies, few friends. Dropped hints at a thread running from eighteenth-century defenses of "customs in common" to the twentieth-century left are hard to take seriously. Is there really any connection between agricultural laborers defending their rights to common land and the Greenham Common women's protest against the siting of Cruise missiles in Berkshire? What are we to make of the episode in *The Sykaos Papers*, Thompson's cold war novel, in which late twentieth-century villagers celebrate "rough music," a ritual whose extinction in the late nineteenth century Thompson eulogizes in *Customs in Common*?

Evidently, Thompson's rage against the forces of order is undimmed, but the warmth he feels for the popular forces of the eighteenth century cannot extend as far as our own century. In *Customs in Common* he is highly complimentary about a few fellow laborers in the academic vineyard, but pretty scathing about everyone else. He insists on the value of history as a reminder of contingency, the depth of ordinary lives, the potential of agency, the possibility of alternatives to capitalism and state communism, but he doubts whether these reminders will have any contemporary purchase, except perhaps in Asia and Africa. He was once self-consciously a voice in the crowd, but now sounds more like a voice in the wilderness.

One of Thompson's choicest essays of the 1970s was entitled "Sir, Writing by Candlelight." It is a satire on the bourgeois Englishman's habit of writing letters to the newspaper complaining about the imminent decline of Western civilization, in 1886 after the Trafalgar Square Riots and in 1970 during a power strike that caused the indignant correspondent to scribble his jeremiad by the light of a candle. *Customs in Common* is written by candlelight, too. This is undoubtedly appropriate for a work of eighteenth-century history: the light cast is partial but authentic and it hugs the author close, binding him to his subjects and shutting out disturbing contemporaneity. But what does this kind of history tell us about our present or our future? For that we may need a different kind of illumination. □

Richard Wolin

THE LURE OF DEATH

THE PASSION OF MICHEL FOUCAULT, by James Miller. Simon and Schuster, 1992. 491 pp. $27.50.

> *I would like and I hope I'll die of an overdose of pleasure of any kind. . . . I think that the kind of pleasure I would consider as* the *real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it.* — Michel Foucault, "The Minimalist Self" (1983)

James Miller has provided us with a luminously intelligent biography of Michel Foucault. Miller, a former book and music critic for *Newsweek* and the author of an outstanding history of Students for a Democratic Society in its predogmatic phase (*"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*), has applied his scholarly and journalistic talent to a subject of daunting scope: the relationship between life and work in the "philosophical life" of Michel Foucault.

Miller's biography of Foucault is a book that has been much heralded and, by some, much feared. Given the status Foucault has enjoyed in American academic circles, there are many with vested scholarly interests who are made nervous at the thought that the master's luster might be tarnished. For close to two decades, in the wake of the New Left's demise, left-wing scholarly energies that were once preoccupied with the problems of capitalism, imperialism, class, race, human rights, and emancipation have been sublimated along poststructuralist lines. The result has been a fascination for

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Foucauldian neologisms such as "discursive regime," "carceralism," "technologies of the self," the "will to know," "power/knowledge," "governmentality," and so forth. As Miller explains in a succinct account of the cultural-historical circumstances that gave birth to Foucault's wild success among the academic left: "Students weaned on the Talking Heads and David Lynch flocked to his public appearances, cherishing the bald savant as a kind of postmodernist sphinx, a metaphysical Eraserhead whose demeanor was weird, whose utterances were cryptic—and whose philosophy . . . could nevertheless be summed in a simple mantra, consisting of two words: 'power' and 'knowledge.' " With the demise of New Left politics, all that seemed to remain was *cultural* radicalism, and it was Michel Foucault more than anyone else who seemed to occupy the furthest reaches of this experience.

There is nothing lurid or voyeuristic about Miller's presentation. On the contrary, one can only admire his unflinching, nonjudgmental, and, in many instances, outright sympathetic treatment of the potentially sensational aspects of Foucault's personal life. Foucault was gay and died tragically of AIDS in June 1984.

For the most part, those aspects concern the philosopher's avowed fascination with the S/M leather/bathhouse scene in the Folsom Street area of San Francisco's Castro district. From his first trip to California in 1975, where Foucault experienced an LSD-induced epiphany concerning the familial origins of his homosexuality (the riveting account of this incident is one of the high points of Miller's narrative), his life—and the relationship between his life and his work—had definitively changed. Foucault waxed lyrical about the robust, uninhibited gay subculture he discovered in San Francisco that same year: "Such a way of life is extraordinary to me, unbelievable," he said to a friend. "These men live for casual sex and drugs. Incredible! There are no such places in France." S/M, he would later remark, is "the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure." People "are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure. The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure, and the idea that sexual pleasure is the root of *all* our possible pleasure—I think *that's* something quite wrong."

As a result of these experiences, Foucault's understanding of his major theoretical project of the late 1970s, his multivolume *The History of Sexuality*, underwent a transformation: after years of research, Foucault diverted his gaze from the normalizing techniques by which society turns us into creatures with well-defined sexual identities (such concerns still occupied center stage in volume one) and instead pursued the possibilities involved in "desexualization." This accounts for the laconic allusion at the end of *The History of Sexuality* to "a different economy of bodies and pleasures" that would be freed from the constraints of the predominant "normalizing" sexual practices. His nocturnal encounters on Folsom and Castro Streets showed him a new realm of erotic possibility beyond the constraints of "modern," socially sanctioned sexual identity.

In his vivid descriptions of Bay Area bathhouse life before the "plague," Miller proves a compassionate commentator. He shows how sadomasochistic practice was consensual; how it involved acting out sexual fantasies that always stopped short of cruelty. Even the most puritanical and closed-minded of readers may find themselves persuaded by Miller's sympathetic, tactful account.

"I think that it is politically important that sexuality is able to function as it functions in the bathhouses," observes Foucault in a 1978 interview entitled *Le Gai Savoir*. "You meet men there who are to you as you are to them: nothing but a body with which combinations and productions of pleasure are possible. You cease to be imprisoned in your own face, in your own past, in your own identity." His celebration of "a multiplication of burgeoning bodies," "of a kind of autonomy of its smallest parts, of the smallest possibilities of a part of the body"; his embrace of "anarchy within the body, where its hierarchies, its localizations and designations, its organicity, if you will, is in the process of disintegrating," fed his own philosophical anarchism: a deep mistrust of logic and reason, of inherited ethical norms, of modern legality, and of methods of scientific classification.

To be sure, Foucault's steadfast "anti-normativism" resulted in his embarrassing partisanship for not a few specious political causes—to wit, his not infrequent alliances with French Maoists in the early 1970s. In an infamous dialogue with Maoist leader Pierre Victor (who, in a later incarnation, became Sartre acolyte Benny Lévy), Foucault tried to outflank the Maoists on the left. Whereas Victor and company, in the spirit of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, argued for the creation of "people's tribunals" that would summarily try and dispatch bourgeois malefactors, Foucault contended that even

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such courts were too formal, that is, "bourgeois," for his tastes. He proceeded to invoke the bloody September massacres of 1792, in which the people dispensed with all legal subtleties by taking justice directly into their own hands, as his preferred model of "justice"—thereby scandalizing even the unregenerate *gauchiste* Victor. As Miller explains Foucault's position at the time: he believed that "instead of instituting a process of 'normalization,' and rendering judgment according to laws, it would be better simply to relay fresh information to the masses . . . and then let the popular 'need for retaliation' run its course."

Foucault was also a relatively uncritical supporter of revolutionary Iran well after the draconian nature of the Ayatollah Khomeini's regime had been exposed. However, such myopia must be balanced against his heroic work on behalf of French prisoners, as well as his courageous stand in favor of the independent Polish trade union Solidarity, at a time when the recently elected French Socialist government was busy appeasing Jaruzelski's Orwellian "Government of National Salvation."

Foucault's California-inspired embrace of nonnormative sexual practice consummated a personal/theoretical search for an "erotics of truth" based on "non-identity." In his thought, the very concept of identity was associated purely and simply with "normalization"—that is, with the reign of disciplinary power. In many ways these techniques of bodily experimentation constituted the fulfillment of a Nietzschean quest for "self-overcoming": a process of aesthetic self-transfiguration that alone allowed one to transcend the narrow constraints by virtue of which we moderns are constituted as "subjects." Thus, Miller's accounts of Foucault's systematic pursuit of sensual excess, of "limit-experiences," are essential to his story — so crucial were these activities to Foucault's own self-understanding as a "postmodern subject" (their omission, moreover, is the chief shortcoming of Didier Eribon's otherwise informative biography, *Michel Foucault*). By investigating this dimension of Foucault's life with such sincerity and candor, Miller has advanced our understanding not only of Foucault the man but also of Foucault the thinker. His real achievement is to show us how for Foucault life and thought were inseparable in ways that few of us before would have been imagined.

There are many ironies here, for throughout much of his life it was the philosopher's habit to efface his own traces as a thinker. Along with theorists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, Foucault was in the forefront of those structuralist and poststructuralist critics who, during the 1960s and 1970s, proclaimed the death of antiquated humanistic concepts such as "man," "the subject," "the author," and so on. The desideratum expressed by Foucault in *The Order of Things*, "that man [read: the "subject" of traditional humanistic inquiry] be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea," may be treated as the watchword for an entire generation of post-Sartrian French intellectuals.

Yet, toward the end of his life, Foucault seems to have radically rethought the relation between "author" and "work" along surprisingly traditional lines. In interviews during the years preceding his death, he confessed that his intellectual *oeuvre* could only be understood autobiographically; that is, in terms of his pursuit of limit-experiences or an ethos of "aesthetic transgression," whose model had been provided by Dionysian-inspired poets of scandal, or *littérateurs maudits*, such as the Marquis de Sade, Nietzsche, Antonin Artaud, and Georges Bataille. In 1983 Foucault informed a Canadian interviewer: "I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own self-transformation. . . . This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to aesthetic experience." Or, as he had remarked to a French interviewer two years earlier, "Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience." Finally, and in the same connection, one might cite his surprising 1982 avowal, "Each of my works is a fragment of my biography."

On the basis of such hints, Miller has done a superlative job of reconstructing Foucault's theoretical/personal quest for "experience." Yet, "The Passion of Michel Foucault"—Foucault's "passionate" quest for intense, self-transformative modes of experience—led, sadly, to martyrdom. His death was a postmodern crucifixion suffered at the hands of a merciless contemporary plague.

For some time before Miller's book was published, rumors circulated concerning its damning and prurient revelations. Although the book has gained many prominent supporters—among then, the gay writer and activist Edmund White and French historian Lynn Hunt—a chorus of powerful naysayers condemned the book in advance. Much of the animosity has been the result of an investigative premise that Miller subsequently abandoned: the suggestion that Foucault, knowing he was dying

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with AIDS in the fall of 1983, continued to have unprotected sex.

Berkeley anthropologist and Foucault intimate Paul Rabinow views Miller's study as little more than an exercise in pseudoscholarly, X-rated sensationalism. "This is cheap and easy and obvious," claims Rabinow. "He's trying to write a sexy book that will make a lot of money." The feminist scholar Judith Butler has characterized one of Miller's central theses—that Foucault's lifelong fascination with death constituted a type of "death wish"—as "insidious and enraging." The spurious linkage between homosexuality and death, she continues, "dovetails nicely with the culturally reactionary position of people like Patrick Buchanan." Butler seems to overreact. For Miller, far from hazarding a general argument concerning "homosexuality and death," claims that such a connection becomes meaningful only in Foucault's particular case. And Miller's claims are convincingly documented: from an early suicide attempt to countless essays and interviews, a preoccupation with death seems to have played a prominent role in Foucault's development.

Miller *has* unearthed biographical data about the philosopher that are likely to be misused by his detractors. Should Miller have refrained from telling the truth when such restraint would have greatly diminished our understanding of Foucault—not just Foucault the man but equally Foucault the philosopher?

At issue here is something much larger than how to understand Foucault's life and work—it involves a clash of worldviews. Poststructuralists, following Nietzsche, do not believe in something like "the truth." Instead, there exist only "points of view" that are backed by determinate interests. Hence, Butler views the stakes involved as pertaining to a conflict of interests alone—the politically progressive interests of Foucauldians versus the Pat Buchanans of the world and their unwitting allies such as James Miller. Miller, conversely, relies on traditional conceptions of historical fact and evidence. As he avows in the book's preface, "Above all, I have tried to tell the truth. . . . Part of my purpose is old-fashioned: telling the truth is what writers of history are supposed to do."

The poststructuralist standpoint invites an ominous practice: where "truth"—however one chooses to define it—fails to coincide with the agenda of political radicalism, it should be suppressed. Yet, when truth becomes solely a matter of pragmatics or interest, as it was for Foucault (in a 1971 essay on Nietzsche, he observes that "all truth rests on injustice. . . . there is no right, even for the act of knowing, to truth or foundation for truth"), we risk losing the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, the just from the unjust, good from evil. And as the sad history of our century amply demonstrates, when radical political agendas ignore questions of justice by turning themselves into their own standard of right, intolerance—if not mass murder—is rarely far behind.

I have only one significant reservation concerning Miller's study. It has to do with the postscript, where the author discusses his reasons for dropping his original line of inquiry concerning Foucault, AIDS, and safe sex. Miller's clarifications raise more questions than they answer. The reasons he gives for dismissing the allegations that Foucault, knowing he was infected with the virus, continued to have unprotected sex, seem to be at variance with the preponderance of documentation to the contrary that Miller himself has amassed in the main body of his study. Though there are those close to Foucault who contend that, until the end, his doctors never came clean about his disease, it is impossible to believe that someone as sexually aware as Foucault could have completely mistaken his symptoms. This is especially true since, as Miller himself demonstrates, awareness about the disease among Bay Area gays was widespread by March 1983. It was then that the *Bay Area Reporter*, San Francisco's gay newspaper, featured a prominent editorial concerning the suspected link between AIDS and unprotected sex.

There is an important piece of evidence that Miller cites early on, but which he strangely lets drop in the postscript. It concerns *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*, a moving autobiographical testimonial by the writer Hervé Guibert, in which Foucault is prominently featured as a character *à clef* named "Muzil." Guibert, a close friend to whom Foucault made an elaborate deathbed confession, himself died of AIDS in 1990. The "veracity" of Guibert's fictionalized account of Foucault has been certified by virtually all of Foucault's intimates.

Twenty pages into his book Guibert recounts the following anecdote:

> In the autumn of 1983, Muzil returned from his [Berkeley] seminar with a dry cough that was tearing his lungs out and slowly wearing him down. Between fits of coughing, however, he was eager to report on his latest escapades in the baths of San Francisco. That day I remarked to him, "Those places must be completely deserted now because of AIDS." "Don't be silly," he replied, "it's just the opposite: the baths have never been

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so popular, and now they're fantastic. This danger lurking everywhere has created new complicities, new tenderness, new solidarities. Before, no one ever said a word; now we talk to one another. We all know exactly why we're there."

The full truth about Foucault's final months may never be known. Yet, it is plausible to believe that Foucault chose death willingly, out of lust for "an overdose of pleasure. . . . [a] pleasure so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it." After all, as he confided to literary critic D. A. Miller several months behore his death: "To die for the love of boys: what could be more beautiful? □

Robert Boyers

A CASE FOR PUBLIC CRITICISM

DOUBLE AGENT: THE CRITIC & SOCIETY, by Morris Dickstein. Oxford University Press, 1992. 240 pp. $23.00.

In his new book, Morris Dickstein proposes to make a fresh case for a creature he calls the public critic. This is no easy job. Though the designation instantly calls to mind the achievements of George Orwell and Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling and Irving Howe, we have been reminded all too often of late that the time of the public critic has passed. Anyone who keeps up with the book wars will agree that, in the American university at least, writing for a general audience is usually regarded as a sign of mediocre ambition and a shallow, journalistic intelligence. Leading academic critics today typically consider themselves professionals writing for an audience of their academic peers. Well-intentioned scholars like Dickstein may do what they will to challenge the authority of fashionable doctrines like deconstruction, but—so it is generally felt—the assumptions and values of public criticism are impossible to resurrect. Anyone thinking to address contemporary literature or ideas in the spirit of Matthew Arnold or T.S. Eliot is apt to seem lamentably out of touch with current moods and expectations.

In fact, Dickstein's effort to recall us to the virtues of clarity, elegance, breadth, and value judgment comes at a crucial moment. Younger writers like Henry Louis Gates, Jr., academics raised in the protocols and assumptions of advanced literary theory, are assiduously making themselves into effective public critics on the model of the very figures Dickstein admires. In some respects, Dickstein is waging a battle that has been in progress for some time, and it is not too much to assert that the battle is going better than he knows. If Dickstein's complaint has principally to do with the apparent unwillingness of literary intellectuals to take on a wide range of cultural issues, to incur political risks, and to cultivate a general readership, then he may well conclude that Gates, Edward Said, and others have lately begun to turn things around.

But of course the matter is not so simple. Dickstein himself cites the inspiriting work of Gates and other erstwhile theorists, from Stephen Greenblatt to Gerald Graff. He knows full well that many younger critics in the academy honor some of the abstract imperatives associated with Arnoldian and humanistic criticism. Complexity? A willingness to think against complacent assumptions? Resistance to the illusion of a perfectly objective knowledge? Such imperatives are as widely approved today as they were forty years ago when Lionel Trilling called for variousness, difficulty, and complexity. Not surprisingly, young literary theorists have for some time trumpeted their radical break with the "old criticism" and pretended that they belonged to the first generation in literary history to challenge the legitimacy of the Western canon and the authority of their critical elders. This nonsense has misled a great many people and encouraged many students to suppose that they had no reason to find out what ostensibly credulous naïfs like Arnold and Trilling actually wrote. But some of the leading deconstructionists and new historicists have understood, or suspected, their derivation from earlier critics, and though they have not always been candid about the facts of the matter, their strategies of concealment have not always prevented us from noting those facts. We have noted, for example, that deconstruction's emphasis on "misreading" and "inner contraction" can look very much like the emphasis displayed in classic 1930s essays by close readers like R.P. Blackmur and William Empson. Or we have noted that the "new" historicism can come on very much in the manner of the "demystifying" criticism associated with Marxist literary analysis, reducing literature to ideology and context in the same philistine ways. Though many academics cling to the pretense that they have discovered entirely novel ways to talk about literature and ideas, the evidence indicates a good deal more continuity and development than you'd guess from the propaganda issued in the name of the radical newness.

This is not to say that unusual and alarming things have not occurred in the literary academy in the last

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two decades. Dickstein rehearses several developments much discussed in the pages of American and British magazines. Many literary academics regard theory as decidedly more interesting and important than imaginative literature. Many subscribe to the notion that works of art, like everything else, are produced by "society" rather than by individuals. Others argue that it is not only impossible to determine what an author intended but futile to think at all of authors, or intentions, or judgments based upon ascribed intention. Some even contend that the past is itself a fiction and that one version of the past is inevitably as valid as any other. Evidence itself, in this view, is no more than a strategy for controlling one's audience.

The vehemence with which such notions have often been espoused has sometimes made it seem that they had succeeded utterly in banishing from the academy all other views. But Dickstein usefully reminds us that alternative perspectives have been steadily advanced, and not merely by neoconservative critics sneering and sniping from the sidelines. There *are* idiots in tenured positions at American universities who—as Dickstein has it—argue that "just because texts [cannot] be tied to a single stable meaning—who ever thought they could?— . . . no sign truly [corresponds] to anything outside itself." That is unfortunate. But there are also cutting-edge theorists like the new historicist Lynn Hunt who acknowledge "that the goal of objective truth is crucial for the historian, though it's elusive and unattainable." Dickstein helps us to regard the academic scene with some sense of the tempering forces at work even in the more radical precincts of the university.

Where Dickstein fails is in his balanced effort to yield ground to his antagonists without often acknowledging the implications entailed in particular concessions. At one point, for example, he insists that we cannot "hold on to the crumbling cultural hierarchy of highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow that was dear to our own Age of Criticism." Why not? Because, he says, "Both the money culture and the media culture have been universal levelers, turning art into a commodity and trash into art—an effect which has exhilarated some artists." We may not like it, Dickstein contends, but we must relinquish all confidence in a "scale of value."

Now it is clear that, in postmodern culture, art has become a commodity and trash is often taken for art. But it is also clear that genuine art continues to be made, that many artists go about their business in almost total disregard of the literary and art markets, and that critical value judgments continue to matter to people who read the culture pages of the *New York Times*, the *New Republic* and other influential publications. The fact that art is frequently bought and discussed as a commodity does not mean that the paintings of Matisse cannot be debated and compared much in the way that an Arnoldian criticism would recommend. For every article on the social determinants of fiction and the hermeneutics of suspicion there are dozens, perhaps hundreds of articles and reviews on the merits and cultural implications of this Norman Mailer novel or that Spike Lee film. And though the commodities market largely determines which works will be widely noticed, the small literary quarterlies, alternative galleries, and provincial museums are around to ensure that the scene remain more diverse than market forces would otherwise allow. In the same way we can argue that, though trash is more and more often taken for art, a great many voices have been raised to wonder why. Dickstein is least instructive when he resigns himself to ostensible facts of life that are apt before long to seem anything but conclusive.

Dickstein is also disappointing when he repeats misleading and superficial accounts of critical schools nowadays scorned by most literary academics. Sure, he allows, today's classroom teachers are almost as committed to close reading as professors were a half century ago when the "new criticism" was all the rage. And yes, new critics like John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Empson, and Blackmur were, back in the thirties and forties, said now and then to entertain an idea. But these "new critics," says Dickstein, "tried to sever the practice of criticism from theory and ideas"; more, they "usually betrayed a surprisingly mechanical notion of form." Comparable charges are leveled against other critics like Northrop Frye. The trouble is that the best of the critics, like Empson, Blackmur, and Frye, are not guilty as charged, and that in any case their best writing is never engaged. Frye is treated as the author of a late and wholly uncharacteristic book. Blackmur is respectfully dismissed for essays written decades after the criticism that affected everyone's reading of poetry. Some writers who figure centrally in the story Dickstein wishes to tell are not mentioned at all. Dickstein's case for a public criticism at once practical and audacious is badly compromised by his spotty and unreliable treatment of much of the relevant material. One can't help feeling that a more sustained struggle with selected passages of Blackmur's essays on modernist

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poetry would have led Dickstein to regard his own formulations on new criticism as shallow and untenable.

Dickstein is much better on figures he admires, figures like Trilling, Philip Rahv, and Alfred Kazin. Though he offers little fresh information on these writers, he evokes the sensibility at work in their prose and persuades us that moral seriousness is no obstacle to aesthetic sensitivity, that an interest in the social implications of art need not result in aesthetic judgments reflecting a politically correct party line. Dickstein also demonstrates that critics like Arnold and Trilling were particularly impressive not in espousing timeless values but in identifying what was timely and essential to the lives of their contemporaries. Current participants in the so-called canon debate conveniently forget that Arnold and his successors were not complacent spokesmen for a dominant orthodoxy. "Arnold's criticism," Dickstein writes, was "always corrective, diagnostic—attuned to his acute sense of the moment and the audience. Arnold's goal was not to create a timeless canon, a perfect society, or an absolute set of values, but to find whatever was needful for a given age." Just so, as Dickstein also writes, "Trilling was drawn to apocalyptic figures like Norman O. Brown and R.D. Laing (when few others had heard of them), only to turn against them in the next decade, when their sensibility became, in his view, a new and dangerous orthodoxy." In such passages Dickstein usefully corrects present misconceptions. He gets at the nature, intent, and consequence of the liberal criticism automatically disparaged by many in the American university today.

Dickstein's is a useful and timely book that makes a persuasive case for particular critics while failing to do justice either to other figures or to important implications of the very issues he treats. It is bracing to read him on Jacques Derrida's disdain for plain evidence, but one misses any effort to account for the control Derrida has exercised over American literary academics. It is important that Dickstein point out, as others have done before him, that for writers like Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan art in itself seems not to matter, but one wonders why no reference is made to particular works by any of these writers, or by their numerous epigoni. Dickstein signals to us in various ways that he has followed carefully the shifts and turns in criticism, but he makes assertions—say, that the leading feminist critics do not much differ from one another in their assumptions and practices—that he neither supports nor pursues.

Throughout, Dickstein insists that he is arguing on behalf of the public critic, and one sees perfectly why he so admires Trilling and Wilson and Orwell and others who fit that description. But in making his case for public criticism Dickstein suggests that it is necessarily distinct from what he calls "technical" criticism, leaving us to wonder why a rigorous treatment of formal matters should be excluded from the work he wishes to promote. Just so, Dickstein invokes concepts like "community" and "relevance" without working through their implications or clarifying their relation to his central argument. One can be grateful to Dickstein for his spirited defense of literary journalism without feeling that he has adequately engaged real distinctions, as between the review and the essay, the report and the assessment. One can admire the generosity of Dickstein's concluding "Dialogue on Criticism Today" without believing that it significantly advances a debate that has become all too familiar in recent years. There is reason to applaud Dickstein's emphasis on the relation of critics to the larger world, but one must wonder why he has virtually nothing to say of Marxist criticism or of the relation between politics and sensibility in the work of writers he likes, from Orwell to Howe. Dickstein has written a lively, impassioned, and provocative work, but it is by no means the "landmark study" hailed on the dustjacket of his book. □

Charles Molesworth

BLOOM IN THE FIELDS OF THE LORD

THE AMERICAN RELIGION: THE EMERGENCE OF THE POST-CHRISTIAN NATION, by Harold Bloom. Simon & Schuster, 1992. 247 pp. $22.00.

Most accounts of modernity treat the advent of secularism as a central force in our world. From Weber's study of the decline of sacralized societies to postmodern theories of the flattening of all value and affect, the modern is regarded as insistently *this*-worldly, to be measured only by standards of its own devising. Yet the religious sensibility, with its longing for some transcendent source of value, persists and, in some of its fundamentalist manifestations, even seems to be on the rise. How to account for this? Does it invalidate all theories of modernization? Will some larger cycle in human history be revealed only as we again embrace other-worldly, sacred modes of thought, and social

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organization is realigned with nonrational schemes? Harold Bloom vaguely but darkly hints at the end of his new book that the next century may even see a return to religious wars. Will we wake up eight years from now in a rerun of the thirteenth century? The persistence of mass religious movements is the surest sign that the Enlightenment view of progress has lost its power to serve as the standard of our schemes for social betterment.

In *The American Religion* Bloom raises a number of questions about the precise relation between modernity and religion even as he adroitly refuses to answer them. His book is a highly personal overview of two hundred years of American religion (chiefly Protestant sects) and through this overview it attempts a reading of the national character. It is a book animated by the belief that spirituality remains absolutely necessary and at no time more than the present, and that Americans—in the best and worst sense—have gotten the religious experience they deserve. However weak may be its claims to rational or universal truth, the American experience of religion has a strong grip on our imaginative lives. Bloom defines his expository task as a critical reading of a composite creed, which he has himself cobbled together and calls "*the* American religion."

He has written what he calls a book of "religious criticism," modeled on literary criticism. In doing this he claims to examine the texts of religious writers, especially religious leaders and visionaries, in exclusively spiritual terms, without regard to their truth value in any secular context. Bloom wants to show us to ourselves, not as pollsters and statisticians outline and detail the masses of citizens but as our prophetic visionaries claim to know us in our heart of hearts. His book invites comparison with Robert Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart* and with Garry Wills's *Under God*, but Bloom is after a hidden truth that these more sober writers tend to leave undisclosed. Whether or not he succeeds is another matter.

What Bloom's religious criticism amounts to is something like an aesthetic reading of various religions in terms of the vitality of their leaders, their imagery, and their narratives. By this procedure, Bloom concludes that the American religion is best represented by three "sects"—the Mormons, the Southern Baptists, and the Afro-American tradition of prophecy—because these express most purely the main tenets of American religious thought. These tenets are that the souls of individuals existed before Creation and are no part of that "fall" into materiality, that what makes the individual soul free is knowledge (especially knowledge that it is a part of God), and that each soul is at its spiritual best when it is most alone with God (this solitude having aesthetic analogues with America's sublime space and belated entry onto the world scene). These beliefs are never set out in any single creedal exposition, and are best adumbrated in such literary figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Furthermore, though our indigenous American preachers never read the ancient and occult texts, they have imbued their teachings with the spirit of Gnosticism, a "heresy" that flourished in writings in the second century of the Christian era. The American religion, on this account, is thus post-Christian, but not post-biblical (because Judaism and Christianity are in Bloom's mind not truly biblical religions).

All of this is daring, much of it is entertaining (though Bloom assiduously disclaims any satire or disrespect for even the looniest beliefs), and most of it is so subjective and questionable that one wonders why the project was conceived in the first place. The short answer is that Bloom needs to read religion as he reads literature. In books of literary theory such as *The Anxiety of Influence* and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revision*, he argued that poets are "strong" only as they vanquish the dread of being overshadowed by other poets, and that one always "misreads" because any text can (and should) be put to any use by anyone who has the power to "usurp" its context or "normal" sense. (For the latter claim he has been mistakenly identified with deconstruction, a movement he loathes.) Without any recourse to sociology or political theory, Bloom proceeds to pass his own analytic and spiritual judgment on a number of sects and movements, and to present his own narrative of how our religion developed.

He finds, for example, the Mormon leader Joseph Smith to be a great and marvelous visionary, while he can barely contain his disgust at the Jehovah's Witnesses; the fundamentalist wing of the Southern Baptists is rather scary, but the early leader of what became the moderate wing, E.Y. Mullins, has made valuable and original contributions to American theology. Bloom, an expert on Romantic literature, puts great stock in originality, especially in America, which he refers to as the "Evening Land." And he also values "strong" readings, which often take place even when a charismatic leader has not read a certain book but comes to a previously articulated insight. Bloom seems impressed with the growth potential of the Mormons, and occasionally prophesies that some sects are bound to die out. His measure of a religious message's worth appears contradictory, being sometimes almost pragmatic

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(how many followers does it inspire?) and sometimes rhetorical (how convincing does one find its sense of spiritual power?).

What gives Bloom *his* strength, however, is not so much his inconsistency and lack of a modern truth test as his willingness to define his own religious position—he sees himself as a nonbelieving Gnostic Jew—and to proceed to discuss spiritual experience as if it constituted its own frame of reference. He never quotes a secondary source without calling it excellent (and then often proceeding to modify it), and he never discusses a religious leader's life without stating whether it was successful or not. Bloom talks in the self-assured tones of a believer, but also the leader of a sect of one. At worst he is an intellectual bully, denigrating most academics, pillorying George Bush's abortion views, deriding "political correctness," smirking at Jimmy Swaggart—but always without any sustained argument and often without a decent exposition of his reasons. At best he imitates his subject: he dramatizes the ability to imagine (or reimagine) one's place in the cosmos by creating a sense of self that is both unbounded and beyond self-centeredness. Something in Bloom vibrates resonantly with the rhetorical power of religious leaders, as he appears drawn to the outrageous for its own sake.

There is another way to read the book, however, and this is to see it as a drama of the self in desperate search for justification. To me this is the core of the book. The challenge in writing religious criticism, I believe, is that one is tempted to become a prophet rather than a commentator. Merely to retell religious beliefs is much too tame for Bloom, and he must engage the spiritual power (as he feels it) of each belief he encounters. In a sense, the severe contradictions of the book stem from his predilection to treat religion as if it were a great lyric poem, a personal claim that relies on its own vivid emotion to demonstrate its truth. Can Bloom treat this mighty and mysterious subject of religion in his own terms, using only his intelligence and experience as guides? Can he speak of religious visions without himself becoming either a vapid prophet or a mere annotator of the power of others? Though Bloom strains mightily, I think his failures are significant.

What often happens in the book is that when Bloom's interest in the religious content diminishes, he turns to political and social—even psychological—explanations of his subject. This turn is, paradoxically, the sign of the book's weakness and the source of its interest. For what Bloom does in the end is offer one more version of America's national character. There remains "enough wildness" in the Mormon sect, as opposed to the "murky drabness" of Ellen White (of the Seventh Day Adventists), to make it more authentically an *American* shamanism. The debasing of the Gnostic sense of self into selfishness accounts for the decay in "our inner cities and in our agrarian wastelands." Pentecostalism "had" to begin in America because "its extreme supernaturalism had to be a reaction against . . . a society where power was enshrined in an abundant materialism." So intense is the exaltation of power in the Jehovah's Witnesses that Bloom "must" call it pathological. The ruin of the Southern Baptist Convention in the last twenty years is a "perfect microcosm" of America during the Reagan-Bush era. Time and again, Bloom invokes a logic based on extratheological, chiefly social and political, evidence, and throws into high relief his shaky claim to be dealing only with the religious truth in his subject. The almost bitter paradox of this book is that it both uses and refuses national identity as a ground of explanation. Indeed, by arguing that America has become a post-Christian nation while remaining in thrall to biblical models of authority, Bloom relies on a belief in the uniqueness of the American experience—its claim to be an exceptional, even a redeemer nation—that is itself nothing short of religious.

Not only secular modernists find many of the claims of America's religious sects nonsensically, even stupidly, offensive; Bloom, for example, compares some of the New Age writings to science fiction. But the struggle for a writer like Bloom is to take a nonskeptical, nonsecular look at religion and yet come up with some modern relevance. Some claim this task would best be pursued by sociology, or by "cultural studies," but for Bloom these are nothing but methods corrupted by academicism, positivism, or "political correctness." However, without some consistent reference to a more shareable framework of explanation (and Gnosticism does not, I'm afraid, fill the bill), the rest of us will never know why religion persists, or even what its patent nonsense is "really" saying. We are free to conjure up the ghosts of skeptics past, such as H.L. Mencken, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Mark Twain, and settle for a dismissive laugh. But perhaps someone will interpret "our" religion as more than an elaborate and occluded version of the American Dream, in short, our national experience and aspirations, our obsessive love-hate relationship with individualism and materialism. And in the face of the New World Order, we are slowly but painfully becoming aware of how little useful understanding there is on *that* subject. □

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Pardons

Editors:

Regrettably, by the time that President George Bush pardoned Caspar Weinberger and five others last Christmas Eve, it was too late to make any alterations in my review for the Winter issue of *Dissent* of Elliott Abrams's book, *Undue Process*.

The pardons do not alter my view that the indictment of Abrams was not fair because he never received fair notice that his deceitful testimony to Congress might constitute a crime. If Bush had pardoned particular defendants such as Abrams on due process grounds, I would have had no complaint. In fact, however, the case of Mr. Weinberger was entirely different. He was accused of lying under oath, a circumstance in which it was made entirely clear to him that he would commit a crime if he perjured himself. Abrams became the beneficiary of the Weinberger pardon because they were both officials of the Reagan administration and both were involved in the Iran-contra scandal. That is, politics rather than considerations of due process of law united them. This seems to me a gross abuse of the power to pardon.

Under the circumstances, had I known about the pardons in time, I would have incorporated a condemnation in my article, and take this opportunity to do so now.

ARYEH NEIER
New York, N.Y. □

Palestinians

Editors:

As the Scriptures say, Michael Walzer strains at a gnat and swallows a camel (*Dissent*, Letters, Winter 1993). He makes much of the fact that Golda Meir dismissed the claims of the Palestinians dispossessed by the founding of Israel with the words "They did not exist," rather than "They do not exist." And, looking on the bright side, he notes that Meir declares herself willing to consider territorial compromise with Palestinians—provided they do not seek a state of their own. This " . . . is not an evil view," he insists.

But he averts his eyes from the really shocking point: Meir's denial of responsibility for the dispossession of the Palestinians and—above all—her rationale for that denial. Asked by the interviewer whether Israel bears "a measure of responsibility" for the "plight of the Palestinians," she emphatically replies, "No, no responsibility whatsoever. . . ." A few sentences later, she adds, "I do not know why the Arab refugees are a particular problem in the world." And, elsewhere in the same interview, she offers the same kind of moral dismissal in the following terms: "When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian State? . . . . It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist."

This is the evil doctrine: the notion that *any* people (with or without a self-conscious collective identity) may legitimately be dispossessed from the land of their birth and ancestry—or be rendered second-class citizens, should they remain in place—and that such actions entail no moral responsibility. And note how Meir justifies this position: by citing the fact that the people in question supposedly never had a state of their own. I am stunned that Walzer does not dissociate himself from those words.

All of this goes to the heart of my objections to Walzer's doctrines on "tribalism." If freedom from the threat of dispossession or second-class citizenship—as I would put it, the right to a legitimate existence within the state—is reserved only to those of the correct "tribe," the stage is set for never-ending injustice and strife. The idea that people lacking self-consciousness as a national entity or lacking a state of their own are fair game for this kind of treatment ought to be intolerable to everyone on the left.

In his penultimate sentence, Walzer implies that Meir's words convey something other than a vision of Jewish domination. Does anyone else really doubt that Jewish domination over the territory and inhabitants of Israel is axiomatic either to that country's policies or to its public opinion, now or at any time in the country's existence?

JAMES B. RULE
Princeton, N.J.

Michael Walzer Replies:

I understand that Jim Rule has a problem not only with the policies but also with the existence of Israel. He dislikes this particular nation-state and perhaps all nation-states—though I am not sure that he really believes that the Left should campaign against the existence of France and Norway or even Croatia and Armenia, all of them states "dominated" by a particular nationality. We should, of course, oppose discrimination against Palestinians in Israel and Algerians in France and Azeris in Armenia, and so on and on. But that is not, as Rule certainly knows, the issue between us. It isn't even an issue between Rule and Golda Meir, who never doubted the

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"legitimate existence," indeed the citizenship, of Palestinian Israelis, who voted for her in large numbers.

The hard question has to do with the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation or in exile. These are the people who suffer oppression and injustice (though the responsibility for their suffering is not so easily assigned as Rule suggests). What should we say about them? I think that Rule wants them incorporated in a secular, democratic state—a neutral state that has no dominant nation, very much like the United States. Everything that he has written in this long exchange suggests that his only model of a just political arrangement is the United States. I believe, by contrast, that there are a number of political arrangements that *can be* just (but often aren't) and that justice is most likely to come to the Middle East in the form of independent nation-states, Jewish and Palestinian. Of course, there are problems with states of this sort. An independent Palestine is likely to mistreat its minorities, and I will look to Jim Rule to complain about that (and join him when he does). But the local alternatives to the nation-state—Lebanon, Cyprus—are so radically unpromising that we have little choice but to live with those problems.

Golda Meir was indeed blind to the national aspirations of the Palestinians. She would happily have handed them over, against their will, to the Jordanian king. But Rule seems equally blind to their national aspirations—and to everyone else's. A good many Israelis and Palestinians (and Croats and Armenians) want to come to the United States. Not many of them want to bring the American political system home. If we are seriously committed to avoiding "injustice and strife," we need to look for a politics that they can democratically endorse and live with where they are. Contra Rule, that will be, for the time being, not forever, a nationalist politics.

James Rule Replies:

We are speaking of a country that was born of a social movement pursuing an extraordinary aim: to establish a state on behalf of one ethnic and religious group on territory then inhabited mainly by members of other groups. To realize this aim, enormous resources were mobilized from many corners of the world. In a violent spasm prefiguring what has lately come to be called ethnic cleansing, thousands of people of the wrong faith and ethnicity were expelled from the land of their birth. To this day, the new state devotes vast military efforts to resisting their return, while struggling to secure its status by immigration of more of the right kind of people. Those of the defeated groups remaining in the territory controlled by the new state do so in a situation of second-class citizenship, or (in the case of the occupied territories) no citizenship at all. Now firmly on top, the dominant group reserves its most severe repression for instances where those on the bottom appear tempted to embrace tactics like those that brought the victors to power in the first place. And for the displaced populations, at least one leader of the new regime acknowledges "no responsibility whatsoever." Michael Walzer apparently agrees: when he writes, "We should, of course, oppose discrimination against Palestinians," he apparently has some other sort of Palestinian in mind.

This is, indeed, not my kind of country. It is bizarre to suggest that conduct of the kind described above is somehow characteristic of states like Norway and France (of Croatia and Armenia I know very little). Neither France nor Norway denies residence or citizenship to people born on its soil because they are of the wrong faith or ethnicity. Nor has either country at any time in this century expelled members of their populations for being the wrong kinds of people in these respects—except in the deportation of Jews under Nazi occupation.

It may well be that separate states for Palestinians and Jews is the best compromise anyone can hope for in the tangled situation in the Holy Land. But such a solution will tend to reinforce a situation in which each country considers it its prerogative to oppress its own "wrong kind of people," as in Northern Ireland. Outsiders may, and should, protest such policies, but their words are apt to have about as much effect as on the Protestants of Belfast.

One must indeed object to systems of ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination, and to institutions of second-class citizenship, whenever these things occur. But for Americans, Israel poses special problems. We, after all, have paid for it, and we continue to do so. According to one recent estimate, the United States has subsidized Israel and its policies to the tune of some fifty-six billion dollars since 1949. Think what that money could have done, had it been

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invested in policies of social equality, either in this country or abroad, rather than ethnic supremacy.

Michael Walzer Replies:

Jim Rule provides a remarkable account of recent Jewish history, which leaves out the holocaust, the years of illegal immigration, the UN vote on partition, the 1948 war, and anything else that might complicate its agitational style: all in all, not the sort of account that I think I need to deal with at length. In the course of his three responses to my (highly qualified) defense of national self-determination, he has managed to raise the ante each time, exposing more and more clearly his hostility to the Zionist endeavor—which by now seems to reach far beyond his hostility toward nationalism in general.

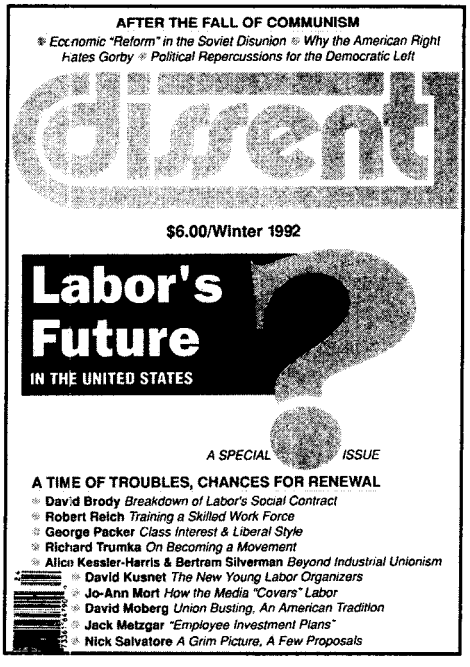
And yet the aim of Zionism was to bring the Jewish people out of a highly anomalous, and very dangerous, political position into a position of "normality." Zionism was an imitative politics, and the norm that governed its efforts was that of the European nation-state. By and large, those efforts have been successful. Israel today, at least so far as its internal life goes, is a normal nation-state, with all the normal problems of nation-states. These problems are complicated by its hard regional environment. To make my analogy with France work, imagine what the situation of Arab citizens and residents would be like were France engaged in an ongoing, forty-year war, which it was always in danger of losing, with all the countries of North Africa. I would guess that French Arabs in such circumstances would be considerably worse off than Israeli Arabs are today. I would also guess that Jim Rule would be considerably less indignant about their condition.

I don't pretend that the nation-state is the best imaginable political formation, only that it is better in practice than the actually available alternatives. As our argument has progressed, if that is the right word, Rule seems to me less and less clear about what he would replace it with and how the replacement might work. He glories now in his pessimism: one can and no doubt should criticize these nationalist fanatics, but the criticism is bound to be without effect. Why bother then? What is the point of all his fierce sentences? At last, at the very end, he makes it all clear: what he wants is an end to American aid to Israel. Cut off the money and watch . . . what? What does he hope will come of that?

(This discussion is now closed—Eds.) □

Erratum

The printer's gremlin worked overtime in Mitchell Cohen's article on "The Problem of Intervention" (Winter 1993). On page 24, the reference to "United States Security Council" should read "United Nations Security Council."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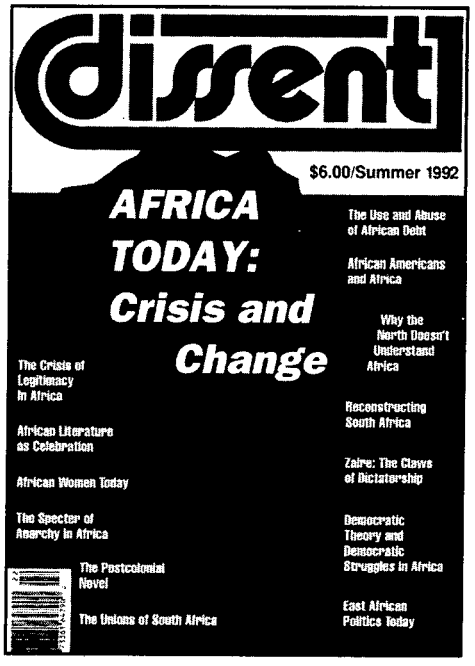
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